

BUDDHIST FOUNDATIONS

# MINDFULNESS

WHERE IT COMES FROM AND  
WHAT IT MEANS

SARAH SHAW



“This book enables the reader to understand mindfulness with scholarly wisdom and a skillful modern application.”

—JACK KORNFIELD, author of *The Wise Heart*

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—RONALD PURSER, author of *McMindfulness*

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Sarah Shaw



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# PREFACE

In the fifth century BCE, in India, the Buddha changed the use of the Sanskrit word for memory (*smṛti*). The new meaning appeared quite different; as *sati*, in Pāli, it came to be associated with an attentive awareness to present events, what we now know in English as mindfulness. Mindfulness became a central feature of the Buddha's eightfold path and a crucial element in the theory and practice of Buddhism as it traveled throughout Asia. It also became a key element in Buddhist psychology and formulations of the nature of the human mind, where it is important in clearing the mind of problems and stale repetitive patterns. Mindfulness informs this psychology. It is also a transformative factor in the practice of meditation and good ethical behavior in the world, freeing the mind from views and opinions that bring about unhappiness.

In the late twentieth century, a number of therapies and techniques associated with cultivating mindfulness, derived for the most part from Buddhist practice, successfully treated depression and some other disorders. The psychological professions were revolutionized by some basic mindfulness techniques, which changed many people's lives completely. Using methods originally suggested by the Buddha, people found radically different ways of working with their problems and began to see them with different perspectives. The theory behind these techniques, however, was largely linked to Western psychological formulations of the nature of the mind. Most therapists and clinicians acknowledge the Buddhist roots of these techniques, but the larger context of how mindfulness is



understood and relates to other mental states in Buddhist psychology is rarely explored.

Buddhism has taught mindfulness as one of its central teachings. But it has also taught quite a few other things too. Mindfulness is one crucial part of a complete system of understanding the operation of the mind and the ways it can develop. So its nature is very different from its application in Western psychological models. Indeed, memory—the ancient Sanskrit meaning of the word—still plays an important part. Mindfulness is said always to work with other elements that support it and that it supports. Within the terms of Buddhist psychology, it simply cannot arise alone and likes company. When it arises, factors associated with it give it an ethical dimension, and other qualities arise too, such as loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. It is found in daily life and is also essential for deep meditations known as *jhānas*. It is also, again with other factors, a faculty that is said to bring liberating insight and to free the mind completely.

This book, which is intended for the general reader as well those with a special interest in Buddhism, gives a brief history as to how the term *sati*, or mindfulness, has been taught and practiced historically in the Buddhist traditions and how it fits with other aspects of the Buddhist path. Some geographical, as well as historical, shifts in usage also emerge. It is hoped that for those who are interested in the background of the word, its meaning and application will become clearer and set in a larger context. This book also suggests that Buddhist understandings of psychology, of “living in the moment,” and of the benefits to be derived from this are more far-reaching than is suggested by many usages of the term *mindfulness* in the modern world.

## DIFFERENT KINDS OF TEXTS

In looking at the history of something so central to Buddhist practice and theory, it is important not to consider Buddhist texts as philosophical tracts, operating purely on the abstract level of ideas, though many work well at that level too. In many texts, mindfulness is described, evoked, linked to other aspects of the mind and the teaching; it is taught and encouraged in a variety of ways. As we shall see, different kinds of texts suggest and locate it differently just by their very style and nature. Some early poems enjoin mindfulness in ways that we find throughout the history of Buddhism, in a less formal setting. Some early canonical texts place it more systematically in the context of other factors that tend to arise with it or where it is one part of a sequence or an assemblage of factors, performing a particular role in each. These early texts are crucial to our understanding of mindfulness, but we do not have to insist that they are the only valid ones and thereby do exactly what they tell us not to: form views and partial identifications about their authority and “rightness.” The austere simplicity of early verses that evoke mindfulness represents one style; they are often heart-based responses or pared-down evocations of a way of finding particular states of mind and a changed mode of being, rather than strict definitions.

Other texts have different functions altogether. Some provide comprehensive, step-by-step “how to” advice on how to find mindfulness. Some place states of mindfulness within a full, graduated meditative system. Some give guidelines about its presence for times of deep meditation. Some list qualities needed for meditation that require mindfulness, giving it varying degrees of priority according to the needs at which that list is addressed. In Indian lists, the placing of an item is often crucial: so, sometimes mindfulness is the first, initiatory factor in a sequence, as in the seven factors needed for awakening, where mindfulness is the first. Sometimes, as in the list of the five faculties needed for meditation, it

comes in the middle, after faith and vigor and before concentration and wisdom, a placing where it supports, rather than instigates, the other factors. Yet other texts list a number of attributes of mindfulness, in order to make it clearer and easier to practice. Abhidhamma, the Buddhist psychological system and theory of the way mind and matter work—developed later in the canon—was intended by those who had tried it out as a way of helping the practice of mindfulness too, of one’s opinions and preconceptions, as much as one’s body and feelings. Some texts, however, just tell a longer story and give an engaging narrative that works on the mind in a different way, just as different genres of literature do. The Buddha taught for forty-five years and, like other good and experienced teachers, would probably have developed all sorts of strategies to teach people as his career progressed.

The Buddha also created a community of those who followed the path, the Sangha. The *suttas* are compositions that are as much about the Buddha and his followers as they are about what he said: the eightfold path, discussed in chapter 1, is seen enacted through their interchanges and brought to life in these as much as it is described. The Buddha validated his sangha’s teachings—they too express things in highly individual ways, for many kinds of people practiced with the Buddha and took different kinds of routes to awakening. Indeed, we can see the extraordinary development of the many subsequent schools of Buddhism as a reflection of this, as new texts and practices emerge.

These are important features to remember. Over centuries, Buddhism evolves in all sorts of ways that are deeply innovative and inspiring, and in the first centuries of the first millennium many texts are “found” in rocks and caves or “discovered” in dreams, visions, and meditations. This is an outpouring from the great creative impetus of this tradition: the Buddha approves

formulations that had “never been heard before.” In his absence, new ways of expressing his teaching start to flourish. While the texts we are looking at in Pāli, found in Sanskrit and Chinese versions too, still retain their hold and are extensively translated in regions where Buddhism travels, radically different texts and practices also emerge and often assume for those within the traditions there an even greater importance. Some are poems, some, such as the Abhidharma systems, describe factors that one can experience alongside mindfulness. Some are ways of practice. Some, such as the Madhyamaka, demand that we become mindful of views as we consider them. They are not ready packaged definitions. Commentaries on the oldest levels of the texts are also greatly helpful. Within Southern Buddhist regions, manuals dating from the fifth to the sixth century ce are sometimes fashionably denigrated now. But they contain teachings, many practical tips, and contexts that would have developed over time. They often represent traditional practice and spell out things we would not necessarily work out from the texts, so they are cited here too. They are often just useful. The Buddha, a good teacher, encouraged his followers to teach themselves in creative ways and to find new ways of expressing the basics of the “handful of leaves” he showed to his first disciples.

Buddhism started in India and soon traveled—to Southeast Asia, China, Korea, Japan, Tibet, and many other regions. For the purposes of this book, “Southern Buddhism” is applied to that which is practiced in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Burma/Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos; “Northern Buddhism” is applied to that which is practiced in Tibet and Mongolia; and “Eastern Buddhism” is applied to that form of Buddhism practiced in China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. Southern Buddhism has tended to be called Theravāda from the twentieth century, and Northern and Eastern Buddhism has been loosely termed Mahāyāna. The way

mindfulness is understood and taught in these various traditions does change, in sometimes subtle ways, but some elements are always retained and can be seen as common to them all.

Words do not need to be institutionalized or static. The word *mindfulness* is, one hopes, always ongoing, always susceptible to new interpretation and new enactment in literary forms and teaching methods. I was at a meditation center before finishing this book, and toward the end of the course I asked some people at supper what they felt mindfulness was. Before we begin, here are some of their responses.

The first person said it was like a ship's gimbal. This is a circular squishy thing upon which a ship's circular compass is placed flat, or a suspended set of interlocking suspended rings, at the center of which the compass gradually rotates. In either case, it acts as a kind of mediator, so that no matter what the turbulence or storms, the compass always remains steady. The gimbal takes the strain of buffeting winds and waves, registering and adjusting to any wobbles or motion. The meditator said this is what mindfulness felt like to him, showing the balance of a path and a way ahead.

The girl next to him recounted a now well-known story from a Paulo Coelho novel, *The Alchemist*. A boy is looking for the secret of happiness and is sent to a castle, where he sees an old man who is too busy with others to have time to chat. The old man tells the boy to go and enjoy the castle for a couple of hours, and he hands him a teaspoon filled with oil, saying, "But do not spill one drop of oil." The boy returns without one drop spilled. The old man asked if he had seen and appreciated the beautiful tapestries and pictures. So vigilant had the boy been not to spill the oil, however, he had not noticed them. He is sent another time, and he enjoys himself so much looking at the castle's splendors that he spills all the oil and returns embarrassed. The man then explains to him

the secret of happiness: “If you want to be happy, you need to keep the oil and enjoy the surroundings too.” The girl who told this story said this felt to her like the best way of describing mindfulness.

We went down the table, and other people made their observations. One person said that mindfulness was “presence”; another said, “it is what makes everything feel alive.” One person said it was “that awareness that means you do not get lost in any objects that are observed.” Another said it felt like “remembering to remember.” Still another called it “just taking care.” Then the last person asked simply if I was mindful that I had put my name down with her to do the washing up—it was probably time we got on with it!

All of these evocations, and the last funny reminder, were apt and showed one aspect of mindfulness. I don’t know if any of those who responded necessarily agreed with one another or offered a formal definition. But they all communicated something about what mindfulness is and feels like. Illustrative similes, analogies, parables, experiential observations, “skill-in-means,” or summaries of ways this quality can usefully be aroused, as well as straightforward definitions and lists of attributes, all feature in the history of Buddhism too. So in this book, we examine the ways, historically and in different kinds of Buddhism, some practitioners, scholars, and monastics have described and placed mindfulness within the wider context of Buddhist psychology, theory, meditation, and daily practice. It is loosely historical and geographical, but Buddhism is not painted in straight lines. Some traditions are local, some span vast areas, and some elements remain the same everywhere. Many mindfulness exercises and ways of describing this quality cross traditions and historical periods; some tend to be associated with particular types of Buddhism.

Each person's description of mindfulness is personal. While writing this book, one image kept coming up for me. You often get bottled sparkling mineral water, which, when you open it, releases a fizz. The effervescence, the icy taste, the sound and even the smell: these all just seem to make me more aware as I drink. Such water comes in various kinds of bottles, some of which say things like "this water has come after lying for thousands of years under the deepest rocks of the so-and-so mountains." I suppose the water flows out and irrigates the arid mountains. I often wonder how the fizz manages to remain intact after all this time; the sparkle goes quickly, so if the bottle is left open for too long, the water just becomes flat. Mindfulness to me is like that: something sort of bubbling up, remembered, perhaps from long ago, that despite this, feels new and refreshing each time.

Whatever image, description, or definition we find helpful for mindfulness, it is always said to be something we as humans can all find, like a birthright. Buddhist texts suggest it allows us to live, to observe and experience, and also to remember. So this book attempts to look at the different "bottles" that have introduced this quality and the various paths they suggest to help us try to find the natural springs for ourselves. It does not, however, suggest that any one tradition, even Buddhism itself, owns the franchise on it, or is the only one that gets it right.

Lastly, a word of explanation should be given about terms provided in both Pāli and Sanskrit, such as *sati* and *smṛti*. These two languages are closely related, and I have used the spelling that is employed by the text or tradition that is being discussed at the time. There are some slight differences in the usage of such terms depending on the context, but this is explained when this occurs. Unless otherwise stated, translations of Pāli texts are my own.

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## MUSIC AND THE MIDDLE WAY

At the beginning of a concert, the tuning up of instruments begins. The musicians listen to their instruments, to one another, the room, and their place with the other players, and so can adjust their tuning. They tighten or loosen strings, or moisten their reeds, and try some scales. Each musician gets the feel of their instrument with their own body and the needs of the time: temperature, acoustics, the amount of people around. The violin needs a string that is not too tight or too slack to make a good note; the clarinetist works the reed to just the right softness and dampness for the mouth. When the moment is right and the point of balance is found in all these conditions, the musicians can begin, and the music can start. This is like the way the path factors of the eightfold path are said to work together in Buddhism. The balanced, even note, the equipoise of the middle way, describes the mind that is awake and on its way on the path to freedom.

The eightfold path was taught by Gotama Buddha, whose death appears to be around 404 bce, at the age of eighty. His life story is taken as an enactment of the middle way. As a young prince, he was brought up protected from the harsh events of the world by his parents. At birth, the seers predicted that this child had two destinies: he could be either a Buddha, a fully awakened being capable of finding and teaching a path to freedom and happiness, or he could be a universal monarch, ruling by justice, not force. His parents, being



members of the ruling class, understandably wanted him to adopt the latter course. They shielded him from anything that could upset him or disturb him from that course. They did not allow old, suffering, or ill people near him, so that he could grow up untroubled by painful concerns for others or by the problem of the nature of existence itself. As he grew up, he had no knowledge—the stories say—of old age, sickness, or death. One time, as an adult, on successive days he went with his charioteer on drives. On the first day, he saw a tottering old man. The next day he saw a very sick man, and, on asking, found out about illness. On the third day, he witnessed a corpse and learned about the realities of death. And on the fourth day, he saw a renunciant, someone searching for freedom from the endless round of birth and death. It occurred to him that the mode of life the renunciant had chosen could offer a way of finding release from suffering, and a means of helping others find that too.

Gotama had found his path. He abandoned his palace and its wonderful sensory pleasures and followed an ascetic life, experimenting with various meditations and visiting various teachers. Not finding success, he tried self-mortification, thus ensuring that most sensations, in contrast to those of the earlier part of his life, were of a painful and unpleasant kind. He thought that perhaps this was the way to wisdom. But this, too, he soon discovered, did not produce greater awareness or any kind of liberating insight. Eventually, he remembered a happy meditative state he had experienced as a child under a rose-apple tree while his father led the plow in a local festival. This he called the first *jhāna*, or deep meditation. He had found, through playful curiosity, a meditation that brought great happiness, one that was at once free from sensory desires and the rejection of sensory events. “Could this happiness be the way to wisdom?” he asked. He thought it was worth a try. So he took food, sat under the Bodhi tree, and remembered

this meditation, developing it still further, so that four jhānas were obtained. Then he extended his awareness back, over many lives and kinds of existence. He became aware of many other beings too, all passing through various conditions according to the actions and the worlds they had created for themselves. Eventually, he applied his awareness to the very roots of the impulsion behind this restless, endless wandering in samsara and traced them back to their source: in the wish to become attached to objects, greed; to being separated from objects, hatred; and to a kind of muddledness about their nature, ignorance. Freeing himself from these, he became liberated and attained complete freedom from future rebirths.

The mythic nature of this tale reverberates. What parents do not try to protect their children? What children, at some point, do not find out what the world is really like?

Most children move from the cocoon of their early life to a world where they are bombarded with impressions of all kinds, many of them painful. How to find the middle way in all of this? How to live in the world without getting stuck: neither selecting only the pleasant, nor pushing unpleasant things away? How to steer the mind amidst events so that it is clear, nonattached, and not muddled? The Buddha suggested it was possible to find a middle point of awareness, an equipoise, whereby objects are known and even enjoyed but not grasped. It is a way to welcome events in the mind or to allow them to occur with genuine peace and equanimity.

When Gotama had found this freedom, he went back to visit five ascetics who had shared his self-mortifications in the period before his awakening. They were initially reluctant to have anything to do with him. He had let them down by taking food and leaving behind the remorseless punishing of the body that constituted their preferred path to wisdom. But when they saw the

radiance and bearing of the newly awakened Buddha, they asked him to teach them. He taught the four noble truths: that suffering is to be understood, that cravings that lead to suffering are to be abandoned, that there is freedom to be realized, and that there is a path to this freedom. This is to be developed, or cultivated, through *bhāvanā*, the “bringing into being” of the eightfold path, with each factor being “right” (*sammā*), or complete. For the path to be brought into being, or developed, the “rightness” lies in its skillfulness and aptness for the situation, a kind of health of mind: it does not cause harm and does not reflect either a clinging or unwholesome grasping at events, but does not reject them either.

The principle of the “middle way,” the evenly tuned note, can be seen in each element of the eightfold path. Right view (*sammādiṭṭhī*) is that seeing of events that does not become rigid by insisting that the “I” that experiences them has an existence that is eternal—or that it has no existence at all and lacks continuity. Such right “seeing” does not let views obstruct vision. Right resolve is the placing of the mind without partiality or rejection, with friendliness or equanimity. Right speech is speech appropriate for the time, which does not cause unhappiness or dissent. Right action is bodily activity that is in accordance with the path. Right livelihood is following a way of life that does not harm oneself or others. Right effort lies in finding the middle way between ensuring that unhealthy states do not arise and grip the mind and that helpful ones arise and stay around. Right mindfulness is the quality of wakeful alertness that keeps “to the middle,” a term often used in Buddhist texts, aware of what is without, within, and the interplay between outside and inside, inside and out. Right concentration, *samādhi*, a word perhaps better translated as “stillness,” is the balanced peacefulness that arises when the mind is restored, particularly in meditation. As with a musical instrument, if the strings

are relaxed, stretched, and flexible, a note can resonate and a tune can be played. Mindfulness and concentration are needed, as well as effort: the musician needs to listen and be aware of the instrument. This kind of alertness to the middle way of attentiveness is taught as the way to be awake to the instrument we have, the body, so that it may become healthy and find the way to wisdom.

The principles are immediately applicable to our interactions with events in the world and with ourselves. The awareness needed to find the right lane in a busy roundabout may require a particular kind of alertness, as you wait your moment when cars push ahead. If you are too slack, you will miss the space; if you are too taut, you will push in at the wrong time. In a conversation, there are moments to comment, to speak of something else, and sometimes just to be silent. And in meditation, there may be a careful awakesness needed to watch an ever-finer breath, as the mind becomes increasingly sensitive as one prepares for deeper stages of meditation. The parent, waiting for a child to go to sleep, is also attentive, but knows too that if he or she dashes up too quickly, the child will not relax and settle.

All of these instances apply to different domains and areas, but all require some degree of “mindfulness”: a wide attention and a relaxed but gentle alertness to events. Mindfulness intuitively finds the middle way and the appropriate awareness and attention the situation requires. It does not push away events that occur in the mind and does not let the mind get too “stuck”: if one is overfocused, without a wider fan of attention, the sense of the moment and the event at hand is lost. The Buddha taught that there is always some volition or choice; we can choose how we become aware. An athlete, deeply focused in an event, needs to be aware: of other runners, the pace, and of the obstructions that can come into the mind, like doubt or overconfidence. The parent rocking the child to sleep sometimes just has to keep his or her

attention at a sustained, very minimal level to make sure he or she does not doze off too. The wakefulness needed for these tasks, to sustain them and to do them well, may vary. In all these activities there is a middle way: the ability to pay the requisite amount of attention, to find the balance that is needed for the time, but not to lose a sense of the whole and to keep awareness of the world around.

When considering the history of mindfulness, we always need to bear in mind the eightfold path. It animates all kinds of Buddhisms and informs the ways in which each one of them develops and is sustained. These factors are distinct but completely interdependent too. None of the other seven path factors can arise without mindfulness. One cannot practice right livelihood, a way of life that does not harm oneself and others, without mindfulness; one cannot perform right or appropriate action without it either. Mindfulness is one element of eight domains in which the path can be brought to life. Like musical instruments working together, they support and enhance one another. And, as with musical instruments, the tuning arises not just from a midpoint but from a poised equilibrium, a balance amidst many factors coming together. The middle way is of the moment, among many causes: the adaptation to strings and reeds, to “feel” and weight, to moisture, temperature, acoustics, and the good placing of the bodies and minds of the musicians. In the third chapter we look at how the Sanskrit word *smṛti* was first used and applied in Indian thought, before Buddhism. Before that, however, it would be helpful to first explore what we mean by *mindfulness* in English too.

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## MINDFULNESS IN ENGLISH

Mindfulness is the English translation of the Pāli word *sati*. *Sati* is an activity. What exactly is that? There can be no precise answer, at least not in words. Words are devised by symbolic levels of the mind and they describe those realities with which symbolic thinking deals. Mindfulness is pre-symbolic. It is not shackled to logic. Nevertheless, mindfulness can be experienced—rather easily—and it can be described, as long as you keep in mind that the words used to describe it are only fingers pointing at the moon. They are not the moon itself. The actual experience lies beyond the words and above the symbols. Mindfulness could be described in completely different terms than will be used here, and each description could be correct (Gunaratana 2011, 131).

### SOME DEFINITIONS

So how did we get this translation, and is it a good one? The history is interesting and, of itself, shows how words rich with associations change and move over time. They are precise, but they can experience sea changes too. The use of this translation has recently been heavily criticized by some, in psychological professions and elsewhere, and many assertions have been made about it. So how has the term *mindfulness* been used, and how has it come to be associated with *sati*?

## THE USE OF THE TERM *MINDFULNESS* IN ENGLISH

In the nineteenth century, Buddhism was discovered by Europeans, and throughout this period the basic teachings, and some texts, were explained and translated. The languages of Pāli and Sanskrit became more fully understood, as did the doctrines associated with them. In Ceylon (Sri Lanka), the British undertook work on translations of early Buddhist texts, and the first Pāli dictionaries were compiled. Spence Hardy, in his work *Eastern Monachism*, explained mindfulness as “the faculty that reasons on moral subjects, conscience” (Hardy, 1850, 442). It should be noted that Hardy’s use of the word *conscience* is not quite applicable and is presumably related to his Christian background.

The first person to use the term *mindfulness* for *sati* was Henry Alabaster, one of the first British diplomats allowed into the protective state of Siam (Thailand). After his arrival there in 1857, he became deeply respected and admired, and he remained in the region for twenty-seven years. The devout King Chulalongkorn regarded him as a personal friend, conferring on him the honorific title Phraya and building a monument for him upon his untimely death. His work is filled with references to contemporary Siamese culture and manners: he observed the monks, the people, and their customs with intelligence, and he developed a keen appreciation of the culture. In his introductory book, *The Wheel of the Law: Buddhism Illustrated from Siamese Sources by the Modern Buddhist, A Life of Buddha, and an Account of the Phrabat* (1871), Alabaster describes the eightfold path of the Buddha and throughout translates the word *sati* as “mindfulness.” He defined a *satipaṭṭhāna*, or a foundation in mindfulness, as “the act of keeping one’s self mindful.”

The translator who gets most credit for the first use of the term *mindfulness*, however, is T. W. Rhys Davids,

one of the first and greatest of the translators of Buddhist texts into English. Rhys Davids defined the term *sati* as “mindfulness” in his still authoritative dictionary, although there were other translations he could have used that were available to him in earlier Sanskrit and Pāli reference works. Monier-Williams, for instance, defines *smarati*, its associated verb in Sanskrit, as “to remember...to recollect, call to mind, bear in mind, think of, think upon, be mindful of” (SED 1851, 1272–73). The 1875 dictionary by R. C. Childers translates the word *sati* as “recollection” and adds that it is “an active state of mind, fixing the mind strongly upon any subject, attention, attentiveness, thought, reflection, consciousness.” Rhys Davids was well acquainted with Ceylon and with the monks there; he too translates the associated verb in Pāli, *sarati* (*smarati* in Sanskrit), as “to remember.” A practicing Anglican, he was nonetheless deeply impressed by the devotion of Buddhist monks he encountered, and he retained a lifelong sympathy for the Buddhist traditions. He would have tried to get it right:

Buddhist or not Buddhist, I have examined every one of the great religious systems of the world, and in none of them have I found anything to surpass, in beauty and comprehensiveness, the Noble Eightfold Path of the Buddha. I am content to shape my life according to that Path. (quoted in Allen 2002, 289)

## ENGLISH USE OF THE WORDS *MINDFUL* AND *MINDFULNESS*

So was this choice to translate the word *sati* as “mindfulness” apt? Seeing the history of related words, one finds a rich vein of association and significance. But the word also arouses in some a strong antipathy, as if it is somehow misleading. So it is useful to look at a neglected area of inquiry and to find out how the word *mindful* itself became popular in the English language.



With the word *mindful*, a biblical association was there from the outset, possibly the reason why some, wishing for more secular credentials, find it difficult or problematic. The first definition suggested by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1. 1801), is “taking thought of, care of, heedful of, keeping remembrance of.” The oldest written usage of the term with this meaning is located in the fourteenth-century Wyclif Bible. This asks, “What thing is man, that thou are myndefull of him?” The translation stays in the King James version. This question, from the Book of Psalms, reverberates with Hebraic associations: the word associated with the translation “mindful” is *zakhor*, to remember. To this day it retains a sense of memory and an awareness of the past. Through Hebrew word play, it also means “male.” So the male “is mindful” of the female, *negevah*, a “well” or “reservoir.” The Psalms verse asks God why it is he who “remembers” humankind (including both men and women), just as the male “remembers” the female. What is humanity to him/her that this “remembering” should take place? This suggests, as we shall see some Buddhisms do too, that this remembering lies at the very basis of mind itself. It is an awareness of a field that is other, and from which, by contact between the two—i.e., perceiver and that which is perceived—the world and thence its perpetuation are brought to life. Putting aside modern gender issues, this perspective is interesting: the active mind in some way interacts with the receptive, the physical, and from that activity a fertile creative process is set in motion. It is rather like the way the mental state of mindfulness is perceived, within consciousness, in some Buddhist systems. It is possible that this early usage of “mindful” in the English language, for good or ill, colored subsequent levels of meaning of the term.

Historically, the word *mindful* also had a very straightforward meaning, as a browse through instances mentioned in its entry in the *Oxford English Dictionary* demonstrate. The nineteenth-century historian Thomas

Babington Macaulay speaks of someone who had “always been mindful of his health, even in his pleasures” (Macaulay 1849, 1: 428). It was also used traditionally (in a rather archaic way now) with an infinitive, in the sense of just remembering to do something. *Kalendar Horticulturus*, a gardening manual published in 1679, suggests one should be “mindful to uncover them [the plants] in all benign, and tolerable seasons.” One also uses the term without any other object, suggesting a state of mind that remembers and bears in mind. The seventeenth-century William Camden’s *Remains Concerning Britain* (Camden 1605, 32), notes in the inhabitants of that land a tendency to use the same familial Christian names throughout the generations: “Antient families have given those names to their heirs, with a mindefull and thankefull regard for them.” This rather active usage, as we shall see, is present in some Buddhist contexts too, as a kind of deliberate bringing to mind and not forgetting something. If one does something carefully and with intentness, it is undertaken “mindfully,” a usage dating back to 1382 in the Wyclif Bible (Job XXXV) or to Henry Brinklow’s *The Complaint of Roderick Mors* (1540), which leavens its deprecations about modern behavior to say, “We must regard, that our mouthe, spirit and hart be elevated together mindfully in faith.” In these instances, mindfulness suggests a bearing in mind of a field, or even a memory, which can be retained in the present moment but does not exclude the “presence” of something else, whether one’s ancestors or the object of one’s faith. There is often a sense of carefulness too—a recurrent aspect of mindfulness raised in many discussions about it in Buddhist practice and theory. Most of the time, as a noun, it has a straightforward association with both intent and memory.

Despite frequent biblical and church usages, the word *mindful* was not a religious technical term; even in the early twentieth century, it was mildly out of use. People

would only really have heard it in church, a fact that is likely a reason for its disfavor among some now, who prefer their mindfulness free from Christian or Judaic associations. But these early uses do evoke both awareness and remembrance, which the word *sati* does too.

As we shall see, the words *mindfulness* or *mindful* are not exactly applied to the same situations as Buddhist terms derived from the Sanskrit verbal root *smṛ*, but the word *mindfulness* offered, for Rhys Davids and others after him, a very appropriate translation for *sati*. Both the English and the Pāli word include, historically, a sense of memory along with the notion of being aware of what is going on around oneself. English and Pāli both include a sense of guarding, too. In some contexts, both languages suggest it can be consciously directed—that is, in the bearing of something in mind or bringing it actively to one’s attention. An ethical dimension and attentiveness to others are also often linked to the English word *mindfulness*, in ways we also find in most Buddhist contexts. The sense of “being mindful of the needs of others,” a usage in Anglican prayers, can, as we shall see, be essential concomitants of mindfulness in some forms of Buddhism. There is a sense that it involves a nonattached, attentive friendliness or equanimity with regard to the object or to other beings. It is worth noting that, rightly or wrongly, it is the very lack of these elements in some modern secular therapeutic definitions and methods of mindfulness that has been criticized recently. The word thus suggests one, sometimes neglected, application of *sati* in Buddhist text and practice. Although his language seems dated, Rhys Davids’s comments on this are worth considering and are still valid today:

When Christians are told: “Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God,” a way is shown by which any act, however lowly, can,

by the addition of a remembrance (a Sati), be surrounded by the halo of a high moral enthusiasm; and how, by the continual practice of this remembrance, a permanent improvement in character can be obtained. The Buddhist idea is similar. But the remembrance is of what we should now call natural law, not of a deity. This has been made a cornerstone of the system of ethical self-training. (Davids 1910, 323)

Rhys Davids firmly rejected “conscience” as a translation for *sati*, but his introduction of ethics was important. So despite some recent objections to the word, on the basis of its usage in the English language, and indeed the traditional meanings of *sati* and *smṛti*, *mindfulness* was a good choice—maybe the reason it is still around. Some words are creatively evocative as well as descriptive, and some culturally specific terms are particularly so: the English notion of “fair play,” for instance, or the German *gemütlich*, create associations and even a worldview, a way of perceiving events in that world when they are used. Such words tend to be untranslatable, imbued with semiological meanings that you never quite get in another language. As this short summary suggests, *mindfulness* has this richness in the English language. And, as we will see, the associated meanings of the word *mindfulness* go well with its Sanskrit and Pāli Buddhist usages. It is certainly difficult to think of a better term.

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## MEMORY

Buddhism did not invent the term *sati* or *smṛti*. Before the time of the Buddha, the word was common—but its associated meanings were with memory and, in particular, with the memorization of a series of texts known as the *śruti* and, in time, a later series of texts, the *smṛti*. In ancient India, the culture, religion, and cohesion of the peoples that inhabited the subcontinent were sustained by chanting and ritual. Around 1500 bce, the Aryan people, moving from Central Asia to Indian regions, brought with them chanted texts, rituals, and stories encoded in texts, the *Ṛg Vedas*. These were maintained in family lines by Brahmin, or priestly, castes. While at an earlier period caste designations seem to have been more fluid, by the time of the Buddha there were four: servants, equated with the feet of Lord Brahmā; merchants, equated to the legs of Brahmā; warriors, from whom local royal families were usually derived, equated with the heart of Brahmā; and lastly priests, the highest caste, purportedly descended from Brahmā himself, who are believed to come from his head. These priests sustained the texts and religious traditions that had been passed down from one generation to the next. Royal houses looked to the *purohito*—literally “the one who stands before”—for advice and wisdom. He and his family lines would be people who maintained the oral transmission of sacred texts.

The Vedas are split into six limbs (*aṅgas*) and are known as “heard” (*śruti*) texts. *Smṛti* applies to the memory used to learn and retain them. They were passed on orally and required the attentiveness and engagement of the entire person to be memorized and recited. A boy in a Brahmin family, who had been through initiations and careful training, would remember the particular group of texts of which his family were acting as custodians. These were the core aspects of the transmitted teachings, which dated back centuries, and in some cases possibly millennia, before the time of the Buddha. We cannot date them, but the oral recitation of texts learned by heart does seem to have been very effective; it was an essential element in the transmission of the Brahminic traditions. To this day, some families use the “pitch” hand gestures that supposedly accompany the texts as oral, performative recitations as a way to reinforce the identity and religious allegiance of the group. This possibly helps memorization, too.

Indeed, a whole body of later texts (composed at various times from 600 bce onward), including the Upaniṣads and many *sūtras*, are known as the memorized (*smṛti*) texts. These too have been learned from teachers, committed to memory, and, sometimes in written form, passed on to the next generation as living expositions of law. Within such texts there are plenty of what are known as deictic pronouns too, whereby the reciter alludes to where he is and the things he can see: the centrality of the human reciter and his bodily presence is important. So, words suggesting “right here” or “in this body” would be referring to the body of the chanter; the sky and the earth would be there too, when chanted. The chanter was at the center of his world, and by his act of memorization was bringing into being for those around him an understanding of the world as it is experienced, known, and understood by a human being. This very ancient use of the term is always glossed over in studies of mindfulness. But such “memory” would

itself require a particular kind of awareness, of oneself, of others, and where one is—it allows the world to be seen and experienced in the way suggested by the ancient texts, which are brought into being and made present to those around through the attentive and active engagement of the chanter and his audience.

Buddhist texts were also chanted for many centuries. Oral transmission of Buddhist texts continued to be the primary means of communicating them to further generations in India. This only really changed, and even then only partially, by the fifth century ce, when written culture began to interact fully with the oral. There were some important differences, though, in the Buddhist oral transmissions. Without familial transmissions, monks and nuns learned whole collections, in lines of different recitation (*bhaṇaka*) traditions. Groups would remember and retain texts simply to keep them going and alive for the next generation. Different bodies of texts were divided up to be memorized and learned by various *bhaṇaka* traditions, as the Vedas were by the Brahmins, thus ensuring all texts were remembered.

So it is in the mode of the transmission of Buddhist texts, like the Vedas, that we can surmise how the word for memory came to shift in meaning more to an alertness or wakefulness to the present. The chanting traditions are still active and living in many Buddhist contexts. Features of oral literature, such as redundancy, repetition, and formulaic passages known as pericopes, or transportable pieces of texts found each time a description of, say, a state of meditation is described, meant that those who were memorizing would have landmarks and easily recognizable key-ins to the texts they were chanting. In the Abhidhamma traditions, lists would contain elements that linked into other lists, and so the memorizer would have a kind of living tree of associations, with branches spreading out of base branches. In turn, these would give rise to other

connected lists and other branches. The nearest modern analogy to this is keying in a word on the internet. So, if one was chanting about the five faculties of meditation, “faculty of mindfulness” would be like one highlighted word on a website that links you to a fuller explication of this term—for example, within the context of the four other meditative faculties that accompany it: faith or confidence, vigor, concentration, and wisdom. This would then take you to other places you could find the term, in other lists and contexts, and so on. It meant that those who memorized texts, as so many did (and still do) in many forms of Buddhism, had a kind of memory system—through often repeated words and passages—that connected them to a vast library, all held in their own memory.

As all three “baskets” (*piṭakas*) of the Pāli canon—the Vinaya (the monastic rules), the Suttas (the discourses in which teachings are delivered), and the Abhidhamma (the higher psychology or teaching)—would be memorized by different specialist chanting groups of monks and nuns, the continuity of the teaching was ensured. Such feats of memory might seem implausible, but in Burma (Myanmar), for example, where training in memorization in this way is still active, there are eleven accredited monks who know not only one collection of texts but the entire Pāli canon by heart. Tested every ten years, they are examined on texts chosen at random, texts chosen by themselves, and preassigned texts. The whole process is rigorously monitored, and the methods by which the monks “build” their internal memory systems are impressive. The Pāli canon is filled with references not only to those who chant and repeat texts well but also to those who hear them too: to be called “one who has heard much” (*bahussuto*) is considered a great compliment. Such recitations are also considered part of bringing the path into being. They are seen as a kind of meditation and a central element of Buddhist practice (*bhāvanā*). Thus, those chanting texts on



ceremonial occasions or for blessings are themselves participating in a mindful re-creation of the Buddhist path.

The recitation of certain areas of the texts is still imbued with a great sense of occasion and presence of the tradition. From its earliest days, the Sangha has retained its intended purity and identity through a monthly ritual known as the *pāṭimokkha*. This is the monthly observance of monastics whereby they repeat their commitment to the Vinaya rules and their assembly is purified by the confession of any faults. The Vinaya rules remind them of the communality of their purpose—the attainment of the path and *nibbāna* (nirvana). On the night of each full moon, newly shaven monks assemble in the shrine hall and sit facing one another on the floor in a many-tiered circle. In large monasteries, there may be seventy or eighty, a sea of saffron-colored robes; ages range from the very young to the very old. The group is there as one unit, and the sense of cohesion and devotion is palpable. Then, from memory, a leading elder, seated on a chair in their midst, recites to the group the whole of the monastic rules, an exercise that takes up to an hour. The chanting can be slow or, more often, done in a quick-fire manner, as the rules are chanted in exactly the same format as they have been in so many locations, every full-moon night, for over two thousand years.

The sense of a field of the sangha is notable, but so too is the sense of both the memory and mindfulness of those participating in the ritual circle. Everyone appears wakeful, attentive, and the full “field of merit” of this body acts as a reminder of the identity and the great adventurous purpose of their undertaking. A sense of memory—of the tradition, of the chants, and of their roles as a unified sangha—informs the occasion. The knowledge that those who were monastics would have undertaken this ceremony too, over centuries, right back

to the time of the Buddha, is part of the experience felt now. This simple ceremony, performed by what is probably one of the oldest living organizations in the world, is an exercise in a group mindfulness that reinforces the sense of the monastics as the preservers of the texts and the tradition and as representatives of the Buddha's teaching.

From this example, we can see enacted many layers of memory and consciousness of the past and the present. Throughout most Buddhist traditions, chanting or hearing the texts, over a period of time, is regarded as a form of *bhāvanā*, a kind of meditative exercise itself, as the words would be imbued with meaning. The third "basket" of the teaching, the *Abhidhamma*, is the delineation of psychological principles operating in consciousness as it reacts with matter in each moment. Just hearing the last and most revered book of the *Abhidhamma*, the *Paṭṭhāna*, the book of causes governing the way mind and matter arise, where repetitions of factors and supporting elements are subtly varied for each cause, is regarded as a meditation. Words that have great meaning—like mindfulness, concentration, or wisdom—recur constantly; they seem to wake up those factors in participants and listeners. Eddies of sound repeat factors from one list that has just been heard, but there are new variations to describe the new "cause" that is being delineated and recited in its entire form. Repetition of such terms, in slightly different arrangements over time, chanted and listened to with attentiveness, would be associated with a strong need for and sense of presence, of the body and the heart. Different suttas, texts from the second "basket," are often chanted in quite distinctive ways and in different tonal variations, depending on the effect intended for the people present. The word *sutta* (Pāli), or *sūtra* (Sanskrit), appears to have been formed from the verb "to hear." So when we "read" a *sutta*, we need to bear in mind that for centuries, before writing was

employed, it would have been recited from memory, and we would once have been listening to a rhythmic but wakeful enactment of the teaching in sound.

Thus, although the Buddhist tradition changed the orientation of the word *smṛti* (or *sati*), for reasons we do not know, it never entirely lost its original meaning. As we shall see in the next chapter, by the time of the first Buddhist texts, the word *mindfulness* undergoes a primary shift in meaning from its Vedic associations to suggest a kind of alertness and wakefulness to events in the present moment. But memory is still involved:

And what monks, is the faculty of mindfulness (*sati*)? Here, the noble disciple is mindful, possessing supreme mindfulness and alertness, one who remembers and recollects what was done and said long ago. This is called the faculty of mindfulness. (S 5.197)

As is so often the case with the vocabulary of Buddhism, the Buddha transforms the meanings of words. Other early Sanskrit texts, such as the epics, retain the use of memory for *smṛti*, and do not extend its meaning in this way. But from the outset, in Buddhism, something new is being denoted, and here Rhys Davids's notes are pertinent:

Etymologically Sati is memory. But as happened at the rise of Buddhism to so many other expressions in common use, a new connotation was then attached to the word, a connotation that gave a new meaning to it, and renders "memory" a most inadequate and misleading translation. It became the memory, recollection, calling-to-mind, being-aware-of, certain specified facts. Of these the most important was the impermanence (the coming to be as the result of a cause, and the passing away again) of all phenomena, bodily and mental. And it included the repeated application of this awareness, to each experience of life, from the ethical point of view. (1910, 322)

As we shall see in later chapters, many forms of Buddhism also appear to employ mindfulness in the very simple sense of memory of what has happened before (chapter 7). Other forms of Buddhism speak of certain kinds of memories that need to be borne in mind: *The Training Manual (Śikṣasamuccaya)* (chapter 10), for instance, emphasizes remembering the other beings with whom one associates, as well as the training. Other Buddhisms enjoin a deliberate recalling of qualities, in the “repeated mindfulnesses” (*anusmṛti/anussati*) we look at later. Renewed attentiveness, all the time, to the present moment, predominates; but behind that, a sense of remembering, whether of the skillful states that one has experienced in the past or the recollections of qualities to bring certain states into the mind, or, quite simply, remembering where you are and what you are going to do seem to remain as underlying assumptions in the Buddhist usage. In modern terms, being mindful means you have to be aware to remember the best route to pick up your shopping and still be home in time for the plumber.

While the early literal sense of “memory” moves to the background, it is never completely forgotten.

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## MINDFULNESS AND POETRY

As an introduction to the way mindfulness is presented in early texts, in this chapter we look at how some short, largely poetic texts evoke the term with little or no narrative context. A little less systematized, these texts communicate a feel for how the term is used, largely outside more formal theories and explanations.

### *THE GROUP OF DISCOURSES*

The first group of texts discussed here is known as *The Group of Discourses*, the *Sutta-nipāta*. This collection is often considered one of the (and perhaps *the*) oldest compilations of Buddhist poems and suttas. We have no means of ascertaining its actual age, but one section within this collection, the *Book of Eights* (*Aṭṭhakavagga*), is often mentioned as a work to be memorized and chanted even in the suttas, themselves considered early presentations of the Buddha's teaching. So it is a good place to start to see how the word *mindfulness* is used in early times: and, from the outset, the word *sati* is employed differently from its earlier Sanskrit counterpart, *smṛti*. It now becomes a quality needed for the awake and free mind, a way of relating to the world that seems to have a sense of presence, apparently more than, and even instead of, memory:

The one with strength of wisdom, endowed with good conduct, having taken vows, concentrated, delighting in meditation, possessing mindfulness, released from

attachment, without barrenness of mind, without corruptions: this one indeed wise men know as a sage. (Sn 212)

We do not know why the Buddha transformed the usage of the term *mindfulness* here. But as a technical term, it is from this time considered an essential aspect of practice on the Buddhist path. As in all the Buddhist contexts we discuss, it is, however, rarely presented on its own. We see this, for instance, in some verses in this same collection. These describe how the Buddha, practicing asceticism, is confronted by Māra, the god of delusion. Māra has a habit of articulating the doubts most likely to beset a meditator at any stage: here, he tries to undermine the Buddha and tells him he is sure to die of his exertions. The Buddha replies:

When my blood is being dried up, bile and phlegm are dried up.

When fleshy parts waste away, the mind becomes clear in confidence; all the more my mindfulness and wisdom and concentration stand firm. (Sn 434)

Thus, in this poem, mindfulness is accompanied by concentration and wisdom, though it certainly occupies the pole position, guiding the other two:

Having brought distracting thought under control, and with mindfulness well-established, I shall wander from kingdom to kingdom, training many disciples.

They, carefully awake, with selves intent, performers of my teaching, will go despite you, where, having gone, they will not grieve. (Sn 444–45)

Mindfulness is now clearly regarded as central to the process of finding liberation, and its meaning of “memory” is subsidiary. It is linked to the ability to curb distracting thought (*samkappa*). It is associated with both wisdom and stillness, or concentration. As this

passage shows, it is accompanied also by a quality that is constantly enjoined throughout Buddhist texts: *appamāda*, “wakefulness” or “diligence.” In this role, the word includes all sorts of care, say, with regard to Vinaya, the monastic code, and training. These functions, performed with attentiveness, necessarily include mindfulness as well. Just keeping to the monastic rules, wearing the robes correctly, and behaving as the texts enjoin is itself a great exercise in alertness to the needs of the time. Mindfulness, of course, does not have to be mentioned to be enjoined or included, and it is worth bearing in mind that throughout Buddhist texts there are many other words that are either used constantly with it, or sometimes instead of it. From this early stage, terms such as such as *vimalo*, “without taint,” and *danto*, “trained,” indicate its centrality as just one element among many that are required for purifying the mind and training it.

Mindfulness, it seems, likes the company of other factors, and some are so often presented with it that they become almost inseparable. A pairing that threads through much Buddhist teaching is also found in *The Group of Discourses*, in the association of mindfulness with equanimity:

Purity through equanimity and mindfulness, with the thought of impermanent things arising before; this I call freedom through knowledge, the breaking up of ignorance. (Sn 1107)

It should be noted that equanimity, so often enjoined in Buddhist practice, is not seen as the denial of feeling but rather an imperturbability untroubled by hankerings or rejection after events: an image that is sometimes given to illustrate this is of drops of water falling off a lotus leaf. The pair, as we shall see when discussing the meditations (*jhānas*) later in this book, continues to be important.

In *The Group of Discourses* a close connection between identification or recognition (*saññā*) and the need for mindfulness is also suggested. The term *saññā* usually refers to that means by which we classify and order our experiences and label them. It arises, however, in many states of mind—as we shall see in Abhidhamma systems, it is considered to arise in all states of mind and may itself be wrong or “colored” by views and preformed opinions. So if there is unskillful consciousness, the mind may misapprehend a situation and judge it wrongly. In *The Group of Discourses* such perceptions and misconceived identifications in situations are often designated by *saññā*: this kind of wrongful labeling leads to disputes and anger between people. Wrong *saññā* leads to proliferation; mindfulness ensures that perceptions are healthy. It then seems to be presented as a means of purifying *saññā* in the world. If mindfulness is present at the moment of perceiving and understanding any situation, then the identification will not be unskillful, and it will be noted without distortion or greed or anger. Throughout Buddhist texts we can feel mindfulness as a little like an ongoing irrigation system, washing through the mind, ensuring that dirt and blockages do not obstruct its perceptions of the world, emptying the mind of views, opinions, and stale ways of looking at the world.

While devotion is sometimes underplayed in some Buddhist practice, from the outset a strong link between faith, or confidence, in the Buddha is linked to the establishing of mindfulness, for certain temperaments. Indeed, we can see in the poems of *The Group of Discourses* that this pairing, which assumes such great importance in many later forms of Buddhism, is very ancient indeed. The old man Piṅgiya, for instance, speaks of his great devotion to his teacher and the teaching, demonstrating a profound faith inextricably linked to the practice of mindfulness too:



Faith and joy, mind, and mindfulness, do not go away from the teaching of Gotama. Whichever direction the one of great wisdom goes, to that very direction I bow down. (Sn 1143)

## THE *SUTTA ON LOVING KINDNESS*

Mindfulness has clearly come to mean something quite different from its early designation as memory or recollection: a wakeful kind of awareness and balance in the mind. But there is another text that is particularly significant in *The Group of Discourses*. The *Sutta on Loving Kindness (Mettā-sutta)* shows how, from the inception of the tradition, mindfulness is not seen as just releasing the mind from views and wrong opinions but as actively opening attention in a helpful way. Here, the mind is trained in *how* to be aware of specific objects, such as other beings, just as much as it is being encouraged to advert to a field where this awareness is to be extended. Indeed, some objects, it seems, are inherently those that, approached correctly, will help the mind and bring peace: they help how mindfulness is applied too.

Thus, the *Sutta on Loving Kindness*, one of the most famous of all early Buddhist texts, radically extends the scope of our understanding of the term *mindfulness*. Constantly chanted for its auspiciousness at all kinds of occasions, it is one of the three texts that are said to bring freedom from all kinds of misfortune when chanted one after the other. The other two are the *Sutta on Good Fortune (Maṅgala-sutta)*, on ways of life that bring luck and happiness, and the *Jewel Sutta (Ratana-sutta)*, on the Triple Gem. The *Sutta on Loving Kindness* provides a celebratory element, extolling the benefits of the practice of loving kindness but also, rather rarely for the *Sutta-nipāta*, some straightforward meditative and practical advice on how one should go about this. After explaining how one should cultivate loving kindness for

the whole world, with “an unbounded mind, above and below and across, without obstruction, without enmity, without rivalry,” it then says:

Whether he stands, walks, sits, or lies down, as long as he is awake, he should practice this mindfulness (*sati*). This they say, is the state of a Brahmā heaven, right here.

Not falling into wrong views, endowed with morality and insight, having discarded attachment to sensual pleasure, he never again knows rebirth. (Sn 151–52)

Thus, the practice of loving kindness is a “mindfulness”: it is associated with the active cultivation of a friendly, boundless mind, and the practice acquires a particular and, it has been argued, salvific importance. Nonattached friendliness toward objects and people is something that itself leads to happiness in this world and, accompanied by other factors, such as the purification of views and opinions, will lead also to liberation. It is something that can, and indeed should, be cultivated as part of the eightfold path if one is to attain what the text terms “that tranquil condition”: nirvana, or freedom from suffering.

The *Sutta-nipāta* has a sense of freshness and a lack of systematization that appeals to many, and we can see the roots of several developments in the use of the term *mindfulness* in later forms of Buddhism: it now connotes a sense of alertness, frequently accompanies and even balances other factors—particularly wisdom, concentration, and equanimity—and is also applied flexibly, as in the practice of loving kindness. It is clear that there has been a considerable departure from its Sanskrit and Indian roots.

## THE *DHAMMAPADA*

Another collection will be briefly considered here, as it too is less obviously systematic but has historically been

one of the most popular means by which the Buddhist principle of mindfulness has been explored. The *Dhammapada* is one of the most loved Buddhist texts, with its verses often quoted, cited, and repeated as a distillation of the essence of the Buddha's teaching. Its date is uncertain: some verses probably predate Buddhism, as pieces of folk wisdom; other verses have no real discernible date. The collection is regarded as canonical, however, and dates back to early times. Here again, descriptions of the one who follows the path of Buddhism are studded through with mindfulness. Not always presented first in a given list of attributes (an indicator of significance in Indian lists), it is, nevertheless, found frequently, and again, often with qualities that are linked to it in other contexts. The following verse is characteristic of this style:

If you're effortful and mindful,  
Pure in deed, acting with consideration,  
Controlled, living by the Dhamma,  
And aware, your fame will increase. (Dhp 24; Roebuck 2010, 7)

The five faculties of meditation, faith, vigor, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom, in which mindfulness literally plays a central role, are also a common setting, here brought together less formally:

Like a thoroughbred horse touched by the whip, be  
energetic and swift  
By faith, morality and effort,  
Concentration and investigation of events (*dhammas*),  
Endowed with knowledge and conduct, mindful,  
You will abandon this suffering, great though it is.  
(Dhp 144; Roebuck 2010, 30)

The most extended treatment of the term is in an active sense, as a daily practice, linked now, in a way that

we see in suttas, to the conscious adverting of the field of attention to auspicious qualities that will bring health of mind:

Gotama's disciples

Are always wide awake:

Both day and night they are ever

Mindful of the Buddha (Dhamma, Sangha, body).

(Dhp 296–99; Roebuck 2010, 58)

One quality often cited as needed for mindfulness, from the early days, is *sampajañña*, variously translated as “clear comprehension” or “awareness.” This appears to be that which gives mindfulness its setting and background. The later commentator Buddhaghosa relates *sampajañña* to clear comprehension of what one is doing in four different ways. The first is awareness of one's purpose: knowing why and for what reason you are, for example, eating, going to a temple, or setting out on a journey. The second is awareness of suitability: is it a suitable time and place to be doing what you are going to do? The third is, for a monastic, to keep the mind on the meditation object; like an animal's “feeding place” (*gocara*), he carries it with him all the time. The fourth is to be aware that all one's activities can be seen as not belonging to the self. These are specialized applications, but in everyday terms this describes our broader awareness of what we are doing and why we are doing it. One can be very mindfully doing a walking practice, but if you are crossing a busy road at the same time, there is not much in the way of clear comprehension! Thus, *sampajañña* seems to refer to a general sense of the setting for what one is doing and its appropriateness. One could gloss it as “awareness of context” or “awareness of consequence”: so closely related to many functions of mindfulness as to seem almost indistinguishable from them, it comes to mean that which keeps the broader picture in mind and

understands why and how one is doing something. In the verse below, the translator gives the word “wise” for the word related to this term:

But for those in whom mindfulness of body  
Is ever rightly undertaken,  
Who do not practise what should not be done,  
Who persevere in what should be done,  
Who are mindful and wise,  
The defilements go to rest. (Dhp 293; Roebuck 2010,  
57)

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## FUNCTIONS OF MINDFULNESS

Longer suttas describe the Buddha, his followers, and the teachings he delivered to them, as well as, importantly, the teachings that his disciples gave to others. The latter are often creative formulations of the teachings too and are frequently sanctioned and approved by the Buddha. There are four major collections (*Nikāyas*) that show—through narrative and extended discussions, poems, stories, and accounts—how the Buddha taught, how he and his followers reacted to one another, and how the Buddhist path was realized in the early days of the teaching. Suttas usually begin with the words “thus have I heard,” and are set “on one occasion,” where the teaching is given by the Buddha, by his monks, his nuns, and even his lay followers. The opening formula is a reference to the way the teaching would indeed have been heard and memorized: the line dates back to a disciple of the Buddha, Ānanda, who remembered, the tradition says, every discourse he heard the Buddha deliver.

In suttas, the primary application of mindfulness is simply to be aware, ensuring that the senses are awake to things around. One later Abhidhamma commentary says it is like salt in food; it just gives everything more of a taste (Asl 121–22). The middle way is found by flexibly paying attention to outside events, to internal events, and to both internal and external events, so mindfulness of these does not go to grasping after things or rejecting them. Thus, if one is aware of the senses, the things one

can see, hear, smell, taste, and touch, and if one notices what pops up in the mind, the sixth sense, one becomes established in mindfulness. At a simple level, there is a sense of being grounded in one's body, in what one is doing—for example, in the feet and the movement in the sensation of walking or running, in the contact with the air, in the feeling of warmth, and, when sitting, in the contact with the seat or the ground. All six senses are areas for mindfulness, so there is a light and open awareness that does not “stick” anywhere—of what is around, in the body, in the room, or outside. Mindfulness here is simple observation of what is happening, inside one's own body and mind, in the world around, and in the interplay between the two.

Mindfulness also has a sense of guarding as well as of being aware and is sometimes referred to as “the guardian of the sense doors.” The most famous simile for this in early Buddhist texts is of the gatekeeper; one text in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* describes one at a dangerous border, likely to be attacked at any time:

In this royal outpost city on the borders, there is a gatekeeper—shrewd, experienced, and wise—who refuses entry to those he does not know and admits those he does.... Just as, monks, in this royal outpost city on the borders, there is a gatekeeper—shrewd, experienced, and wise—who refuses entry to those he does not know and admits those he does, and it is guarded for the protection of those inside and the exclusion of those outside, just so, monks, the noble disciple is mindful, endowed with the highest degree of mindfulness and care, remembering and recollecting things done long ago and said long ago. With mindfulness as his gatekeeper, the noble disciple abandons the unskillful and brings into being the skillful. He abandons the blameworthy and cultivates what is irreproachable. (A 4.107)

This text tells us a number of things about mindfulness. It is of a type one often finds in the suttas, of various aspects of the teaching linked together in a way one does not quite find elsewhere but that brings to the forefront one way of looking at elements of practice needed at a particular time. Thus, as it so often does, mindfulness works here with other qualities, those that it needs and those that need it. The gatekeeper is careful, experienced, shrewd, and wise. The gatekeeper will have seen many things and will know the kinds of people that might bring a threat to an outpost city as well as to specific individuals. Mindfulness helps to recognize known enemies, but it may also have a kind of instinct about some unknowns, where threats may not be so obvious. A modern analogy would be, for instance, like walking into an office where, for some reason, the feeling tone feels harsh and the atmosphere is unfriendly. One needs to be aware externally, or the mood may be contagious and affect one's internal state.

Mindfulness is also linked here to more qualities, with which it works in a company: the city pillar, unshakeable, that guards the city as faith (*saddhā*) guards the mind; the moat, like self-respect (*hiri*), ensuring that the city cannot be invaded, just as the mind cannot be invaded by blameworthy actions and behavior; the rampart, from which danger can be seen, like the scrupulousness (*ottappa*) with which the mind guards against the attack of unskillful states; the weaponry, well stocked, like the mind of one who remembers teachings and understands them; the armed forces, always on the ready, like the vigor (*virīya*) of the practitioner who has kept unskillful states at bay but cultivates good states too. And, after the gatekeeper, the height of the rampart—that is, wisdom (*paññā*)—able to see a wide perspective and have an overview of the whole. Mindfulness works in unison with these.



The gatekeeper is key, however: he lets people in and out. Here, awareness is explicitly linked not just to guarding but also to a discriminative ability that checks not just what is perceived but whether it too should command attention and be let in to the mind. The mind that is awake to events and sense impressions from all directions is also the discriminator, who instinctively, and from memory of past problems, knows what to exclude and what to let in—even dangerous outpost cities need trade, thoroughfare, and for the citizens to be able to come in and out.

Memory also plays an explicit role in this function of mindfulness. Mindfulness of the present moment in modern times, of course, involves all sorts of memories: where the car is parked, which traffic routes tend to be too busy at a certain time of day, and what is the best way to park in a busy street. The memory itself may lie elsewhere—the attribute of identification or recognition in early Buddhism is usually associated with the store of categories, situations, and people that are recognized and labeled from the past. It will be mindfulness linked with clear comprehension, however, that knows which information is suitable for a particular moment and which to deploy. Mindfulness may be aware of the present, but the present is made up of many past conditions too. Knowing which is suitable, and which deserves our attention (*manasikāra*), is the job of mindfulness. The city gatekeeper continues to be a favorite image for mindfulness in meditation too. In practices involving the breath, it is often used to describe the point at which the breath touches the nostrils: by keeping steady awareness there, a sense of what is coming into and leaving our own “city”—the human body—is present all of the time. In this way, mindfulness is said to “stand near” and guard the mind from getting lost or overexcited.

Another function of mindfulness suggested by the gatekeeper image, in addition to guarding, is discrimination. This is not judgment, in the sense we often apply it to criticize ourselves or others, but a capacity to sift through experiences to find and remember what is helpful. Mindfulness in early Buddhism, as we see later on, is said to be a defining aspect of the skillful or healthy mind. So where mindfulness is established, unwholesome states are recognized as threatening well-being. This need not be the same as self-criticism. Rather, it is a kind of intuitive ethical sense that is considered an essential accompaniment to mindfulness itself.

There is a text that is later than the Pāli canon, though regarded as canonical in Burma, called the *Questions of King Milinda*. In this text, composed sometime between 100 bce and 200 ce, an Indo-Greek Bactrian king converts to Buddhism and asks questions about various faculties needed for meditation and daily life. When he asks about mindfulness, his teacher, Nāgasena, describes it as having two properties. Both of these are found described, with much the same language, in most forms of Buddhism. The first is “not drifting away” (*apilāpana*), translated sometimes as “not wobbling.” It refers to gourds not floating away when at sea. Here, the mind does not drift off but sustains awareness of the body, of the wider field of where one is and of what one is doing.

Mindfulness is compared to the treasurer of the universal monarch, a mythical king who rules his kingdom with justice and kindness, not force. When the Buddha was such a king in a past life, he said he practiced the divine abidings as meditations: loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. We can see the king as consciousness, at the center of a wheel that extends outward. The treasurer of such a king, mindfulness, keeps the measure of his wealth and

reminds him from time to time what great things he possesses. The treasurer also reminds the ruler of things that are good in one's mind that one can draw on. He also brings to his attention things that are not good and the unskillful states that need to be put aside. A basic appreciation of what is there and the sense of its worth, in any circumstance, is also suggested. So mindfulness is not just guarding but also active: it brings to mind skillful states, or things that will help a situation, and it discards those states that will not help. It is like a kind of "spirit level" in the mind that keeps things even and balanced.

The second property of mindfulness described for King Milinda is "taking up" (*upagaṇhanā*); the mind knows what brings it benefit and what does not. It is like, the text says, the advisor of such a monarch: he advises on the best course of action and on how to proceed for the best interests of his kingdom. The advisor knows the mental states that are good to cultivate and those that are to be discarded. For example, if one is in the middle of a conversation and notices one is getting too impassioned or angry, being aware of the effects of this on the body will make one watch and guard but also notice that there is a route that could be followed that is not going to help anyone. So mindfulness turns away from the anger and looks for another route that may be more helpful. Mindfulness does not just keep the mind awake; by keeping alertness to events, it also knows what is useful to cultivate and what is not. This active property requires ethical awareness. This awareness does not necessarily require a verbal description of what is going on or a judgment. Rather, it calls for an innate sense of what is right and suitable at the time that is said to accompany the mindful mind.

This brings us to proactive aspects of mindfulness, which helps set up patterns to ensure the mind is awake and cheerful. A key feature of the Buddha's teaching was

that we all have choice (*cetanā*) in every moment. So we can choose to be aware but also to direct the mind gently to things that will keep the mind steady, happy, and grounded or, if it is slack, give a sense of urgency. The early texts describe ten such mindfulnesses. These are known as *anussatis*—repeated mindfulnesses—usually translated as “recollections.” Some of these *anussatis* (lit. “bringing to mind again and again”; *anu*, “repeatedly” + *sati*) are constantly encouraged by the Buddha when dealing with people who have many lay commitments, with houses full of children, or who are involved in busy work (A 5.332–34, A 5.336). Although each one has a slightly different purpose, they are ways of maintaining alertness and an underlying sense of goodwill and peacefulness during the day or in meditation.

We have already seen a sense of this active property in the last chapter, where the practice of loving kindness—a friendliness to oneself, other beings, and events during the day—is recommended for all times. Like loving kindness meditation, these “repeated mindfulnesses” are often undertaken in seclusion. Some are often practiced in groups, while some are more for private meditation. Some can simply be brought to mind in daily life. They have also been called “remembrances”—things to bear in mind that will help the practitioner to feel well. In texts, they are also constantly recommended for experienced meditators and for those who have found the path: they remind the practitioner to keep an appreciative sense of what the mind can do for itself, simply by bearing these subjects in mind. The remembrances are as follows: recollection of the Buddha, of the teaching (Dharma), of the community (Sangha), of good moral behavior (*sīla*), of generosity, and of the gods, with the possibility of happiness in the future. There too is mindfulness of death, mindfulness of the body, mindfulness of the breath, and mindfulness of peace.

Some of these recollections might seem strange for those interested in mindfulness in a secular context. How can such remembrances bring happiness? For practicing Buddhists, however, they set up the mind up for the day. The recollection of the qualities of the Triple Gem (the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha) is often chanted, by practitioners on their own or in temples with others, in the evening. The Buddha, the “knower of all worlds,” points to the innate capacity for compassionate wisdom we all have in ourselves; the Dharma the path and the happiness it can bring. The Sangha can be seen as the community of those who share a sense of path too. The remembering of one’s virtue or of times when one has been generous may seem odd, but these practices are considered ways of bringing to the mind what can cheer it, and they are often recommended at death, linked to the chance of future happiness, that is suggested by the gods. Mindfulness of death gives urgency to daily life, and this is encouraged, a little, to remind us that life is short and to make the most of the opportunity of a human birth. Mindfulness of the body can be practiced at all times. Mindfulness of peace, the remembering of moments where there has been freedom from trouble in the mind, is also suggested. Mindfulness of the breath can be a sitting practice or be there in the background during the day. It will be discussed more in chapter 14.

Many of these remembrances are considered suitable for daily life, but many are also a basis for meditation. These are very brief interpretations of ten meditations discussed in very great detail in the texts, but noting them here is a reminder that *what* one is aware of, as well as being aware, can have a great effect on the mind.

## CAN MINDFULNESS GO WRONG?

Can mindfulness ever be “wrong”? There are ways of being very alert to events around while having wrong intent. Terrorists about to plant a bomb are super

watchful, but may be completely unmindful of their underlying hatred, the views that animate their actions, and the consequences of the terrible pain they will cause. In our own experience we can get it wrong too. This may be the result of times of mild confusion, absent-mindedness, or moments of a genuine lack of good volition! Suttas record a “wrong” or “false” mindfulness, just as the other factors of the eightfold path may be “wrong” or “false” (M 3.140). Frequent sutta references to the possibility of “wrong” factors of the eightfold path suggest that they are factors that actively militate against their opposites. We do not find much in later commentaries on this, but when it is “wrong,” mindfulness seems to arise in a vitiated form, as the alertness present when there is desire to harm or steal, when one is committed to an actively wrong spiritual path, or when there is a kind of negligence present, when something is “to be thrown away as dregs” (Paṭi 2.86). The Buddha, for instance, noted one occasion when a deeply corrupt monk defiled the assembly and had “wrong mindfulness” (A 4.205). There is also the milder “forgetful in mindfulness” (*mutṭhasati*) (D 3.252), a kind of careless absent-mindedness, which, along with the word denoting its absence, *asatiyā*, “nonmindfully,” seems to describe mild lapses of attention. A monk careless about cleanliness has this (Ja 3.486). So there can be “wrong mindfulness,” or even “nonmindfulness,” but awareness through other aspects of trying the practice of awareness, again and again, is the natural corrective.

As we have seen, mindfulness is described with several specific functions: it involves awareness, guarding, discriminating, remembering, keeping the mind on course, and actively encouraging skillful states of mind. But there is one other thing it is said to do, stated explicitly in the following passage:

And how, great king, is a monk a gatekeeper for the faculties of sense?

Here, a monk, seeing a visible object with the eye, does not grasp at the appearance nor grasp at its various details. Because harmful, unskillful states such as longing and discontent would assail him if he were to abide without restraint regarding the eye faculty, he practices restraint, guards the eye faculty, and achieves restraint over the eye faculty. Here, hearing a sound with the ear...smelling an odor with the nose...tasting a flavor with the tongue...touching a physical object with the body...apprehending an object with the mind, the monk does not grasp at the appearance nor does he grasp at various details. Because harmful, unskillful states such as longing and discontent would assail him if he were to abide without restraint regarding the faculty of mind, he practices restraint, guards the faculty of the mind, and achieves restraint over the faculty of the mind. Endowed with this noble restraint over the faculties of sense, he experiences within himself an untainted happiness.

In this way, great king, a monk is a gatekeeper for the faculties of sense. (D 1.70)

This extract, taken as a preliminary from the text on meditation we discuss in the next chapter, says something important about mindfulness. Mindfulness certainly often accompanies equanimity, and is often linked to it, but it is specifically associated with making us happy too.

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## MINDFULNESS AND CONCENTRATION

### *An Ancient Pairing*

The Buddha changed his whole course because he remembered the great joy of one meditation; it inspired him to find the eightfold path. And so the need for all factors of the eightfold path permeates the sutta teaching on meditation. Meditation practice in canonical texts is rarely taught in isolation; far more often it accompanies many other preliminaries, such as the cultivation of ethical behavior, and factors to be practiced afterward, such as insight into the signs, or the purification of view. There is a special pairing of mindfulness with concentration, or stillness. This is ancient, and as we saw in chapter 3, from early times both are seen as crucial for the meditative path. The two do not seem historically to have been considered mutually exclusive. On the contrary, in calm meditation they are always described as working together, with an increase in mindfulness accompanying and being crucially needed for successive stages of calm meditation.

We can see the interplay of mindfulness and concentration by looking at a teaching taken as the classic description of the benefits of meditation and the attainment of the first four jhānas. This is *The Discourse on the Fruits of the Life of the Recluse* in the Dialogues of the Buddha (*Dīgha-nikāya*) (D 2.47–86). This



description, delivered by the Buddha to a tragic parricide, King Ajātasattu, is, ironically, the classical account of meditative development in the Buddhist tradition on the way of calm (*samatha*), a term translated in some traditions as “calm abiding.”

In this teaching, the Buddha describes to King Ajātasattu the stages of the meditative path. Before embarking on meditation, the practitioner needs to keep the moralities. For monks, this refers to his rules—keeping to his Vinaya or monastic code and living simply and without harming others. For laity, though they are not specifically mentioned in this text, this refers to the five precepts: undertakings not to kill, steal, indulge in harmful sexual practices, lie, or allow the mind to become intoxicated. Then the meditative process can begin. The first stage is quoted at the end of the previous chapter: the arousing of mindfulness all the time, being aware of the senses in each moment, and encouraging happiness right at the outset of the meditative undertaking. Then the meditator guards the senses, with mindfulness and clear comprehension, like a gatekeeper, in every activity of the day, whatever he or she is doing. Then, he or she becomes content and satisfied with little. For a monk, he is satisfied with his robes and bowl, just as a bird carries his wings as his only burden when he goes into flight. Then, and only then, he sits in a quiet, secluded place to practice meditation: folding his legs in a cross-legged position, he makes his body straight and sets up mindfulness before him.

Mindfulness animates all these activities. Having made preparations, it is now time to do the sitting practice and cultivate the *jhānas*. First, the meditator abandons the hindrances to meditation: sense-desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and depression, and doubt.

Then, he attains the first meditation, the one experienced by the Buddha when he was a child under

the rose-apple tree, mentioned in the first chapter. As he says in the suttas, it was the memory of the happiness of this state that prompted his insight that the way to liberation may best arise in mind that is contented and free from trouble (M 1.246–47). Accompanied by thinking, examining, joy, happiness, and unification, this state is compared to the bathman, presumably an attendant in a public bath, moistening soap flakes into a ball, so they make a lather for washing. In meditation, where the mind is developed to attain such a jhāna, mindfulness sustains attention on an object so other things do not distract, allowing concentration to bring unification and a sense of peace. This is not stated here, but is elsewhere, where the five faculties of meditation—faith, vigor, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom—are said to arise together. The second jhāna, where thinking and examining are dropped, is accompanied by joy, happiness, and unification, as well as an internal silence; all “chatter” has now gone; the bodily experience is compared to a deep lake suffused by underground springs. Mindfulness is mentioned specifically again in the third jhāna, where joy is dropped and there is strong happiness and unification; the feeling in the body and mind is compared to a lake of brightly colored lotuses that grow and blossom under water:

The one who is equanimous and mindful abides in happiness and enters and abides in the third jhāna. He pervades, drenches, saturates, and suffuses this very body with the happiness that is free from joy, so that there is no part of his body that is not suffused with happiness. (D 1.75)

Commentaries debate whether this means this meditation needs more mindfulness or arouses it naturally, as part of the state. Great happiness and unification require great sensitivity to the object, and to the slightest disturbance, to be sustained—so as well as being a more mindful state, one could add that there is a

need for yet more mindfulness too, so that it can be kept going. Finally, he enters the fourth jhāna:

With the abandoning of happiness and physical pain, and with the prior disappearance of pleasant feeling and painful feeling, he enters and abides in the fourth jhāna, which has neither suffering nor happiness, and has the purity of mindfulness that results from equanimity. (D 1.75)

According to the slightly later Abhidhamma, this jhāna has *majjhataṭṭā cittassa*, a “middleness” of the mind, which is the same as balance (*tatramajjhataṭṭā*)—literally “being right there in the middle” (Vbh 271). Thus, mindfulness is the sustainer of the fine attention needed for this state of equipoise and deep equanimity. It is compared to a man sitting with a pure white cloth over his head, covering him from head to toe. The word *upekkhāsatipārisuddhim* can mean mindfulness and equanimity or mindfulness purified by equanimity: the deep feeling and sensitivity of this state is then seen to purify the mindfulness that is present. All of the descriptions describe this state as suffusing the whole body as well as the mind: the mindfulness is complete. It seems that it too is now transformed by the emotional depth and purification of this state.

This meditation is also a kind of crossroads. The meditator can cultivate the formless meditations—where, according to the later Abhidhamma, mindfulness is also always present—of the mind, although not of the body (DhS 265–68). However, in this sutta, he or she can also cultivate great powers, such as knowing the minds of others or recollecting past lives. These seem like outflows from the stillness of the fourth jhāna: many arahants, awakened beings, are mentioned as being particularly good at one or several of these powers. Indeed, they are often mentioned in association with meditators very close to liberation, as if they are natural byproducts of the ever-purified mind. Some arahants do not really

practice these specialized powers at all—Sāriputta, for instance, famously the great exponent of insight, prefers to analyze his meditations in detail. Moggallāna, however, the Buddha's other great disciple, also awakened, practices them as a kind of exercise of his meditative skills, an integral part of his way of teaching. For him, they become tools that help him show compassion, a way of helping others whom he senses need help or reassurance. So, he employs the divine eye to see who is in trouble, and needs guidance, for instance. It is as if the powers of the mind have flowered for the benefit of others: many texts include descriptions of these abilities, often just before the meditator enters into awakening. For all of these, a highly alert and sensitive mindfulness and imperturbability is required. But it should be reiterated that not all meditators choose to cultivate such abilities. For some, the fourth jhāna is the point where he or she can simply go to the insight that frees the mind of corruptions altogether—and attain final awakening on that basis alone.

Meditation is considered an adventurous undertaking, and people choose which of these routes to follow, the texts say, according to their temperament and teacher. As the images that describe each one—soap-making, the deep lake, the lotuses growing under water, and the man covered completely in a clean white cloth—suggest, the practice of jhāna is a very satisfying and complete path. It is the usual one described in Buddhist texts. As the Buddha says to one layman, Mahānāma, who has practiced a great deal of insight, he will not really be able to give up attachment to the senses until he knows the happiness of jhāna (M 1.91–94). So these meditations seem to make us want to be mindful as much as they seem to make us need this quality!

Mindfulness in calm meditation is sustained by many means. The play of jhānas (*jhānakīla*), described in later texts, needs a kind of open curiosity, so the meditator

can move between the states, treating the mind with respect, but at the same time not taking personal attainments too seriously. A lightness of touch is needed for this, requiring a great alertness and humor. It is established through awareness of the emotions and feelings. The meditator needs to be able to be flexible about moving between states and not get stuck. The need for this fluidity is why, in ancient times, *samatha* was referred to as the “wet” way. Mindfulness is also crucial to assuring that the meditator can enter and leave any state when they want to. One sutta, listing the five things that should be made to arise in meditation, says of the fifth (and according to the Indian pattern thereby the highest) element: “I enter into this concentration with mindfulness and emerge from it with mindfulness” (D 3.278).

This is the path known as *samatha*, or calm; it is related by root to the word *samādhi*, concentration. Wisdom and the peacefulness of calm need one another. The wisdom that lacks the stillness and appreciation of loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, or equanimity is simply not wise. It is a subtle hatred or a cold “detachment” that cannot appreciate the worth of others and of objects around. The later commentator Buddhaghosa says that the one who has too much “wisdom” without such factors has, in practice, lost real wisdom: he or she is like one who is “sick with too much medicine.” Conversely, the practice of concentration, or right *jhāna*, cannot work without mindfulness and wisdom. As two of the faculties needed to attain *jhāna*, they also characterize all correct *jhānic* states. Thus, wisdom and calm work together: compared to the two wings of a bird, these two, throughout the history of Buddhism, have been held together by mindfulness.

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## THE FOUR FOUNDATIONS OF MINDFULNESS

One great text has formed the basis of much Buddhist practice throughout history: the *Great Sutta on Mindfulness*, the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna-sutta* (D 2.290–315). It traveled wherever Buddhism went, and as it did, new practices and perspectives were added. It is a great traveling bag for some of the most popular practices in Buddhism, and just paying light attention to each section gives some sense of the great richness and detail with which mindfulness training was encouraged and taught historically. Some texts have interesting background stories, great emotional appeal, or contain simple evocations of what it feels like to be mindful. This one, however, does not, and is sparse, to the point, apparently designed not to let us dwell too much at any stage of its momentum. It is an enactment as well as a manual of mindfulness. It is as if it has been designed purely to make sure that mindfulness is present, at each stage of the text, and, as it gradually fans out from its starting point—the individual in a body—through successive stages to the whole of the Buddhist path, it shows how the unconditioned and how freedom from all worry and suffering can be found in a path that is graduated, has each step clearly defined, and leads “only one way” (*ekāyana*).

The sutta refers to four foundations, or applications, or establishments of mindfulness. They are domains in

which mindfulness can be found and encouraged. Two meanings are associated with the term *satipaṭṭhāna*: it is either an establishing, in the sense of a sphere, or a range or domain for mindfulness. Both of these interpretations seem helpful.

The four “foundations” in brief are as follows:

1. Body

The first tetrad of the sixteen stages of mindfulness of breathing

Mindfulness and clear comprehension in all postures

Mindfulness and clear comprehension in all bodily activities

The thirty-one parts of the body

The four elements

The contemplation of the foul

2. Feeling

3. Mind

4. Dhammas, or events

The five hindrances

Five groups of clinging (*khandas*: body, feeling, identifications, volitional activities, and consciousness)

The six sense bases, internal and external

The seven factors of awakening

The four noble truths

The eightfold path

The text starts, as so much Buddhist practice does, “contemplating the body in the body”: internally, externally, and both internally and externally. This threefold formula is used for all of the four foundations: of body, feelings, mind, and dhammas or events. The

meditator is “ardent” and “clear-comprehending” and undertakes his mindfulness of each of the four foundations. And so once again, mindfulness is supported: the meditator is motivated, ardent, and has a clear sense of context too.

The first four stages of breathing mindfulness are associated with bringing calm and here introduce mindfulness of body. The meditator sits in a secluded or empty place—for instance, under a tree—and arouses this object, using the practice that is discussed further in chapter 14. Then, he (a generic monk is the subject, though, as the commentary says, this refers to men and women, monastic and lay) knows when he is walking or in any of the postures. Then, there is clear comprehension in all postures: the meditator knows what he is doing and its purpose. In all postures, the meditator knows the body and feels what it is doing—walking, eating, urinating, and defecating are all practiced in this way. The different elements are felt—earth, water, fire, and air. The body parts are all then examined, each in turn, with mindfulness and clear comprehension, like observing a corpse in stages of decay.

The body is seen in all kinds of perspectives, and we move away from the meditator under the tree to a sense of the body as moving through stages that somehow dissolve a sense of attachment to it. It should be said here that the practices now are those undertaken with teachers in Buddhist traditions, advising as to how to keep the middle way. The intention is not to arouse disgust; indeed, these are usually taught as calming practices but need appropriate guidance to get them right.

The meditator then moves on to feeling, knowing whether there is a pleasant or unpleasant feeling, or a neutral one, inside, outside, or both inside and outside. So, if one enters a room with friendly people, one notices



the effect; if people are unfriendly, one is mindful of that and the effect that has too.

The meditator proceeds then to mindfulness of the mind, knowing, for instance, if it feels constricted, open, or boundless. He knows if it feels free or if it does not.

Finally, the meditator goes to the fourth foundation, of dhammas. This word is often left untranslated: it means things that happen, or teaching, or law, or how things work. According to the text, to be mindful of the fourth foundation is to be aware of the four noble truths and the eightfold path in everything. This is not an exercise in categorization or labeling. Rather, it is an awareness that encompasses the other three mindfulnesses, giving direction within them and showing a path ahead. Detailed as it is in this text to include many things, this awareness can move to a way of seeing and being aware of process: how the mind moves from one domain to another, how it risks getting caught, and, importantly, how it can feel the establishment or the foundation of an awareness that is steady within these changes. The text shows a way of being in the world—without being ensnared by categories, identifications, or limitations that prevent the mind from being free—in any situation. These four foundations, say the Buddha, if practiced well, lead to the end of unhappiness and to liberation.

The sutta, while often incorporating new practices and techniques as it traveled, particularly as it moved to China, always demonstrates a kind of gradual progression. It moves from the person and the experience of oneself as a discrete entity, through a gradual range of “how to” pieces of advice, to an examination of experiential fields in which the processes of arising and ceasing can be seen operating. It is as if the mind, by moving from one field to another and becoming aware of different aspects within each field, discovers through them the way of experiencing these domains in which an experience of nonself is possible. Each

“foundation” or “application” is marked by a series of practical, meditative devices to enable a shift in the perceptual mindfulness of events. Attention is brought to bear on a particular aspect of body, feelings, mind, and dhammas, its rising and falling is noted, and so its impermanence and lack of substantial permanence is seen.

The text starts with a clearly defined “self,” the meditator at the roots of a tree, watching the breath. It then moves through the various areas experienced by that self. Next it opens out into a recognition of the three marks—of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and nonself—in all events, at all times. As its fruition, it moves back into the world, where the practitioner participates again, seeing it with different eyes. One could say it moves from a “solid” experiencer to the gradual dissolution of those categories by which that practitioner can identify and label events that are outside, inside, and both inside and outside. Subject and object become less important, and, indeed, the distinction between the two appears to dissolve into the experience of nonself within all events that can arise in the world and in oneself. At the end of the text, when the Buddha describes the factors of awakening (discussed in the next chapter) and the eightfold path, the meditator has a firm foundation in all worlds: in the unconditioned, in the availability of the full eightfold path, in meditation, and, if he or she chooses, right back in daily life and the body again in the world with others.

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## THE COMPLETE PATH TO AWAKENING

The Buddha taught through lists: they are easy to memorize, link to one another, and in various ways connect to other ones too. Throughout Asia, one sees vast banyan trees, whose branches span out, interconnect, and then seed from the ground again, a living example of an organic system that perpetuates itself through continued contact with the ground from which it grows. Over years, the old trees spread laterally, using the prop roots that have reseeded, to grow over a wide area, and they become a grove, with every trunk connected directly or indirectly to the primary trunk. The overlapping lists in Buddhism are rather like this. They are designed, it seems, as memory systems, with boughs, twigs, and roots organically related, interacting with each other, becoming prop roots themselves and branching out themselves in new directions. Buddhist texts work together. Their elements are constantly growing into other lists and are repeated in different places. Memorized and chanted, in different combinations with one another, texts take one factor and give it an initiatory role as the first element; in other texts, this same factor may play a slightly background role or work with different aspects of the mind in new ways. In an oral teaching, before the internet, you could “look up” qualities or special factors needed at different times, if you knew the texts, and track them back, through the branches, to other interrelated suttas and texts.

So, before we move on to other kinds of texts and other forms of Buddhism, it will be helpful to consider the central trunk, so to speak, of all Buddhist theory systems in all regions: the thirty-seven factors contributing to awakening (*bodhipakkhiyādhammā*). It is a kind of underlying tree of lists and is said to describe all the elements needed for the practitioner to find the full path to awakening. These thirty-seven are found throughout the Buddhisms we explore in this book:

Four foundations of mindfulness

Four right efforts

Four bases of success

Five faculties

Five powers

Seven factors of awakening

Eightfold path

Mindfulness appears eight times in this list, more than any other factor. Each time it assumes a slightly different role.

The four foundations, discussed in the last chapter, define the very roots of this central trunk of Buddhism. It is the basis from which all Buddhist practice grows: the four domains of the body, the feelings, the mind, and an awareness of events or phenomena, as they rise and fall.

The four right efforts are associated with vigor and right effort on the eightfold path. They are the effort to put aside the unskillful, the effort to abandon the unskillful that has arisen, the effort to encourage the skillful, and the effort to keep it going. We need the middle way in this: we need to recognize our own faults, habits, and hindrances as they arise, but we also need to welcome and encourage ways ahead, like mindfulness practices, that keep the mind well.

The four bases of success are willingness, vigor, mind, and investigation. They refer to ways that people can achieve success in practice: through a willingness to change, through effort, through transformation of their mental state, and through investigation.

The five faculties form the basis of meditative practice and include faith, or confidence, vigor, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. All of these are needed for wisdom to be balanced. They are also needed for entry into deep meditation, where they are developed together so that they support one another.

The five powers are the same as the five faculties. However, they are deepened and strengthened to direct the mind in a particular direction.

The seven factors of awakening are essential for a balanced Buddhist path, in meditation and daily life. They are mindfulness, investigation, vigor, joy, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity.

The eight path factors are the foundation and the culmination of the path. Discussed in the first chapter of this book, they cover eight areas of our being, our thinking, and acting, which can become *sammā*—that is, “right” or complete. The first two of these are right view and right resolve, often associated with the development of wisdom: these ensure that ways of looking at the world and opinions do not become rigid or fixed and that there is no taint in our intentions with regard to them. The next three, of right speech, right livelihood, and right action, are concerned with morality in all our dealings and ensure that we do not harm ourselves or others. The last three, of right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration, are more concerned with meditation, ensuring the mind is balanced and has fuel, with a contented basis and peacefulness for all other activities.

Mindfulness assumes a different role each time it occurs. It can act as a foundation, as we saw in the last

chapter. In the five faculties, being in the central position, it balances the other four, so that confidence, wisdom, vigor, and stillness come into balance and harmony with one another. As a factor of awakening, it initiates; it establishes a ground from which the other factors can grow. As a path factor, it is supportive; it works with the others, sustaining other path factors, as we saw in chapter 1. This is the summit, the place where the tree reaches out for the sky and makes a canopy for all around. But it is also where the tap roots are sent back down to the ground to start the process all over again. It brings the meditator back to the world and back to dealings with people, and the events of daily life.

## SEVEN FACTORS OF AWAKENING

One list that makes mindfulness the initiating factor, which the other elements simply cannot arise without, is the seven factors of awakening (*bojjhaṅga*), of crucial importance for health of mind and for a happy development within the path. These seven keep the path balanced and the mind agile and content. There are stories in the canon of the Buddha and his followers being sick, but just by hearing these factors, in turn, they become cured. If one thinks about it, the factors of mindfulness, investigation, vigor, joy, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity sum up well the qualities one would like to see in a child, growing happily and healthily. We want our children to be alert, to investigate playfully, to have strength and joy, to be able to do things tranquilly, and, when needed, with stillness. Crucially, we want them to be able to let go if they do not get their own way! If we have these factors, according to Buddhist traditions, we have the basis of skillfulness in the mind at any stage of the path or our life.

The seven factors can work as a sequence, and, in meditation with calm or insight, can be seen in this way. In daily life, we can take an analogy. Doing the

gardening, if it is something enjoyed, is a good example. When you start gardening, you have to establish a domain, a field where you will work: the neglected plot at the back of the garden, for instance. Investigation begins with the digging and weeding. You need to see how moist or dry the soil is, work out the weeds, and distinguish them from things you want to keep. There may be a lot of troweling, looking to see what is tangled with what, and being realistic about what you can do that day. Vigor arises when ways ahead are seen, and you can just get stuck in. You can just really throw yourself into the work. This leads to joy, if we are lucky, and the job goes well. Then the process takes a slightly different turn. The first part, up to joy, has been active in an investigative way. Now, from that basis, the work can go through the stages to completion. A sense of tranquility may settle as you work, focus and concentration arise when fine details are dealt with according to their needs, and finally, equanimity arises: one has done what could be done, and the job is complete—until next time.

Buddhist texts say the process of the seven factors works in the same way in meditation too. The domain or object of the practice is defined, and one becomes aware of it. The meditator “puts his or her mind to it, explores, and gets involved” in the object—for example, the breath. Eventually, “indefatigable vigor” arises, as the person becomes fully engaged. Joy, free from sensual desire, then animates the practice, and “in the one whose mind is joyful, both the body and mind become tranquil.” When there is tranquility of body, happiness is said to arise, and the happy mind easily goes to concentration, or stillness. Eventually, the one who completes the process, with equanimity, becomes “an all-around overseer of the mind.” Like the gardener, the job has been done for that day (S 5.67–70).

Clearly, all sorts of problems and hindrances can get in the way, and this is where mindfulness can be renewed:

noting restlessness, boredom, or excitement, one can bring the mind back to balance and the object of the practice.

The list of the seven factors of awakening underlies most Buddhist meditative systems, in one way or another, and is found, like the whole list of thirty-seven, in all Buddhisms. It is, in a way, the series that ensures that the path factors have a chance to develop, in a way that suits the person and the time.

Now it is time to move on to another kind of text. All those discussed so far have been suttas. So we turn to some of the ways the central tree of Buddhism spread and took root, with systems that emerged from the early teachings or from other regions. And, just like plants and trees adapting to new soil, Buddhist practice and theory changed and took some radically different forms.



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## BUDDHIST PSYCHOLOGY

### *Abhidhamma*

What is happening in the mind when I am awake? Can an animal be mindful? The third “basket” of the teaching, Abhidhamma, which deals with these issues, is very different in tone from the suttas. Known literally as the “higher” or “further” teaching, its psychology and philosophy are expounded through elaboration of principle, rather than through the dramatic enactments of situations we find in the suttas. So in this and the next chapter, some of the details of this Buddhist approach to the workings of the human mind, and its relationship to the physical, are examined.

Everything, according to early Buddhism, is in a state of flux. Abhidhamma—or Abhidharma in Sanskrit—explores with great precision events and processes in the mind and body of the practitioner at different times, as they change—in daily life, in meditation, and in the moment of the attainment of the path. Possibly related to early Buddhist memory systems called *mātikā*, the method of the Pāli Abhidhamma is to posit questions, which are then answered, often through the enumeration of lists. Such lists were necessary for the sustaining of an oral tradition. In the Abhidhamma, they are used to distill and describe the quintessential features of consciousness in relationship to matter, as they arise in one moment. We could say that rather than describing

particular circumstances, these lists describe what is present in *any* circumstance when there is, say, a mind that is skillful and experiencing the path.

Thus, the first book of the Abhidhamma, *A Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics*, the *Dhammasaṅgani*, is based upon just one triplet from an earlier memory system: What are dhammas, or skillful events? What are unskillful dhammas? What are neutral (undeclared) dhammas? Lists of attributes and features of skillful consciousness are described. A bit like a map of the mind, it offers landmarks, distinguishing features, place names, and effects, so that the meditator, in any state, at any time, can understand what is experienced and whether it is skillful, unskillful, or neutral. It describes, in the simplest terms, all possible states of mind. Used and loved to this day in Southeast Asian Buddhist countries, Southern Buddhist Abhidhamma offers a living system of human—and animal and divine—psychology that is still popular at all levels of society, in Burma and Thailand particularly.

The Buddha taught the transience of phenomena in the three signs: of impermanence (*aniccā*), dis-ease (*dukkha*), and nonself (*anattā*). Shortly after his death, this understanding was extended into the doctrine of momentariness: that in each moment, matter and mind arise, come into being, and pass away. This process happens all the time, everywhere. It occurs in physical form, which we see as solid, and occurs, at an even quicker rate, in the mind. An understanding of this effervescence of rise and fall, in every moment, then became systematized in the higher, or special, teaching (i.e., the Abhidhamma), which examined each mental state and each physical manifestation in the world around and described what occurs when it arises. The insight into transience is, of course, attributed to the Buddha. The Abhidhamma is a way of describing the doctrine based on how it works, in principle and in

practice. It appears that it was intended as a means of understanding all events that occur in our relationship to the world around. It describes the factors present in meditation and in daily life, providing a language for explaining events that could be understood by all—though not everyone, of course, would necessarily employ this subtle system.

One can see how this was felt necessary: it is clear that many practiced very advanced meditations at the time of the Buddha but that many also mistook some attainments to be enlightenment or became fixed in views about what, say, happened at death or on the path to awakening. Abhidhamma provided the antidote; fluid in its delineation of the way the mind is always changing, it steers a middle path between seeing everything as flux, which would lead to annihilationism, the extreme that nothing endures, and a sense of continuity, which could lead to the extreme of eternalism, the notion that any entity would last forever. Clearly, human beings, animals, and physical objects do have continuity: they last for a while, are identifiable, and are capable of being labeled. According to this system, each being takes a new birth with an underlying consciousness for when the mind rests (*bhavaṅga*), either in deep sleep or at the end of every sense-door thought process. It is a passive (*vipāka*) consciousness that remains, usually, throughout the lifespan of that person. It operates, to use a simple analogy, rather like the way a bouncy ball “remembers” its shape: consciousness naturally returns to it at rest. But consciousness also has ever-changing mental states, which shape karma or, in Abhidhamma terms, *kamma*, for the future. It is these mental states that create our karma for the future: if skillful, the result (*vipāka*) will be beneficial, and if unskillful, unfortunate.

So the Abhidhamma is a systematization around a doctrine of flux. It shows how, in any moment—or, as the

texts say, “at whatever time”—that a particular state of mind arises it is accompanied by various factors that support and contribute to its skillfulness or unskillfulness. The intention of this, for those who are on a Buddhist path and practicing meditation and mindfulness in daily life, is to help people to support those things that can and need to be supported and to find ways of working against old habits and tendencies that have a pattern of recurrence in our lives—which is not, of course, necessarily permanent either.

Each genre of early Buddhist literature has its own excellences: some are poetic, some practical, and some tell good stories. The Abhidhamma is quite different. It is, in effect, a long series of questions that are answered by lists of different mental factors, physical factors, and other phenomena that arise at different times along with what characterizes those phenomena. This is not “abstract” or remote. Rather, the Abhidhamma purports to be a checklist, describing the events in the mind that will be present in various meditative states and in daily life so that meditators can keep on track and know when the mind and body have become fixed and hard.

The way Abhidhamma is perceived now in Southern Buddhist countries, and which many scholars see as working in ancient times too, is as a living and highly practical tool: a way of defining characteristics present in meditation, daily life, the attainment of path, and the simple objects around us that will help us understand them. It is a bit like looking at a simple thing, like a glass, to check whether or not it is a glass. We might ask questions: Is it colorless? Does it have consciousness? Can you pour water into it? Does it act as a container? Abhidhamma does ask these questions about physical objects, but its main interest is in what is experienced by the mind, the mental states that arise with certain types of mind, and how these mental states relate to physical objects. How can I understand my own mind? In this

form of Buddhism, matter is regarded as “real” just as consciousness and the mental states it experiences are “real,” but the ways we perceive it can be different. Such questions can be applied to meditation states and states of mind too. Designed as a liberating system, Abhidhamma addresses attention and investigation into the consciousnesses that are skillful, are associated with meditation and path. This, in time, will then make such consciousnesses more accessible and available to the practitioner. So, the question is asked, What factors are present when the mind is healthy? How does the mind and body change when this happens? These factors are then all listed, described, and placed together in groupings that are natural to them.

From the point of view of our topic here—mindfulness—the first question in this work, “What are skillful events?” tells us quite a bit and explains which states are characterized by mindfulness and which are not. It soon becomes clear that within this system are some features so closely associated with mindfulness that they are, in practice, inextricable from it. Mindfulness is a determinant in their very arising. Throughout Buddhism there is a sense that, as Bhikkhu Bodhi puts it, establishing mindfulness involves “a constellation of mental factors that work in unison” (2011, 21). In effect, the Abhidhamma asks the question, Where does mindfulness occur? The answer is, In all the skillful consciousnesses, and in those of the awakened beings too, who produce no more kammic effect in the world. Do any of the unskillful consciousnesses contain mindfulness? No, they do not. What early texts suggest, Abhidhamma states outright. There is an inherent paradox in giving fixed form to a system that describes movement and flux. But it was a chanted system: as each mental state was described, it would be sensed and understood by those hearing it too, in a kind of flow that itself echoes that of consciousness reacting with matter, in an ongoing process. This would be the case

historically, and now. It also describes meditation. In areas where the jhānas are frequently practiced, having a “checklist” of features present in the mind when the mind enters meditation is very helpful and ensures that states are not mistakenly identified as jhāna, for instance, when they are not.

In Abhidhamma, there is also a different understanding of the nature of the mind that is only implied in the suttas, where psychological understanding had not yet developed into a systematic “map.” In Buddhist psychology, the three roots of greed, hatred, and delusion (or ignorance) color the mind. But there are also three positive roots too: nongreed, or generosity, nonhatred, or loving kindness, and wisdom (D 3.215). The mind also has, in addition to defilements, a natural propensity to radiance and brightness: the wish to give, the wish for others’ well-being, and, sometimes, wisdom. Skillful consciousness in Abhidhamma always possesses nongreed and nonhatred, and it often possesses wisdom. So the mind is seen as also having an underlying skillfulness or radiance, whose passive reflection may be seen when it returns to its natural state when asleep or when it is at the end of the thought process.

The explicatory method employed in the Abhidhamma is also different from that of the suttas. Their particular times and occasions when the Buddha or his followers taught describe events in the mind in a narrative, sequential process. With its copious lists and questions that are immediately answered, Abhidhamma rather takes a snapshot of the mind at any one moment, like a three-dimensional still image in a complete sensory cinematic sequence, and suggests ways it can be examined, tested, and encouraged. This “still” image of mindfulness is interesting. According to this system, every time there is skillful consciousness, there is not just mindfulness but also the path: the way to the unconditioned, like a door, is potentially open. Exactly

the same factors are present in skillful consciousness in the world as those in the awakened mind. It is just that, in the awakened mind, they are all present, whereas in skillful consciousness and in jhāna, only some are. They all come together at the moment of path, however, and the unconditioned is then known.

To use an analogy from the texts, it is a bit like going on a walk and knowing there is a breathtaking view just out of sight. Sometimes the trees clear, and you get a glimpse of the view; at other times you do not. Walking on a bit, you get a glimpse of the view from another angle; then you do not. Only when you arrive do you see the whole view, the whole of the Buddhist path coming together. Moments when the mind loses all unskillfulness and spontaneously is taken out of itself—for example, when one helps someone who is stuck somewhere, or when one gives someone food when they are hungry—will have some path factors, such as right mindfulness, right action, and right resolve. It just will not yet have all the others. In meditation, there may again be mindfulness, but it may be with deep concentration; right livelihood, action, and speech will not be active at that time. Coming to the full path, however, is a finding of all the path factors perfected together.

How does this work? By the twelfth century the Abhidhamma had been further codified and systematized in a volume known as *A Manual of Abhidhamma (Abhidhammattasangaha)*, used to this day in Southern Buddhist countries as an introduction to this subject. It is a simplification of the early material but an accurate one. Taking the many synonyms of the *Dhammasaṅgani*, it presents the contents of each consciousness in a clearly assimilable list. So now let us look at the contents of the skillful mind according to this work's classification.

## WHAT IS A CONSCIOUS BEING?

There are some factors in all Abhidhamma systems that accompany any kind of consciousness, whether that of a dog, a cat, a human being, or even (according to early Buddhism) the gods, who embody the joy and happiness of what are regarded as the heavens—realms where beings are reborn, often for immensely long periods, for keeping the eightfold path and for practicing the meditations. Those in these heavenly realms, even though their bodies become more refined and light and are scarcely material at all, and even though their minds may be filled with various kinds of bliss and happiness, still experience a basic consciousness composed of particular factors. Fully awakened beings, who live in the world and yet are free from it—this includes the Buddha—still have these factors. They describe what it is to be a conscious being and show how Buddhist psychology identified the basic features of consciousness itself. They include:

Contact (*phassa*)

Feeling (*vedanā*)

Identification, or recognition (*saññā*)

Will (*cetanā*)

One-pointedness (*ekaggatā*)

Life (*jīvitindriya*)

Bringing-to-mind, or attention (*manasikāra*)

These are known as the universal factors of consciousness: mental states that allow the workings of consciousness to happen in the first place. Every moment of consciousness has contact with an object. Even in deep sleep (*bhavaṅga*), where the mind is being refreshed, there is some contact with an object, upon which that consciousness depends. In the case of humans, who usually retain the same skillful



consciousness as their base throughout their life, there will be, it is said, the object on which the mind came to rest at the moment of their last death. To have a human rebirth is usually a skillful outcome. So while this mind is passive, the result of past deeds, rather than creating new kamma and outcomes, it will be restorative and skillful and have some sort of object, such as a light or a peaceful scene: consciousness is defined as that which perceives an object, and it has one even in deep sleep. Alongside that, there is feeling of some kind. In humans this will naturally be neutral or pleasant. There is also some form of identifying or processing going on. The function of *saññā* (identification, recognition, or, in some translations, perception), is to recognize, to label, and to store as memory. Closely related to mindfulness, it is, however, slightly different: it is by means of *saññā* that I recognize my house, the fact that it is an apple I am eating, or that I know my name. Mindfulness might make me aware of any one of these things at a particular time, but the work of recognition and sorting takes place in this kind of storehouse of experience built up over one's lifespan.

After that comes volition, or will. Central to Buddhist thought, and arguably the one feature that distinguishes the Buddha's teaching from others of the time, is this notion that the mind always has choice, even if it is not active. The possibility of choosing how one responds to objects, and whether skillful or unskillful consciousness is taken up, is always there. The next factor, one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*), might seem strange. It is exactly the same, in Abhidhamma terms, as concentration. How can, say, a restless mind be unified and one-pointed? One-pointedness is, here, a kind of cohesion of mental states in the mind. Whatever they are, for that moment, they stick together and arise simultaneously.

Life (*jīvitindriya*) refers to the life of the mind, without which there could be no consciousness at all.

Related to the life of the being involved, it is the psychological counterpart to the physical life that sustains and keeps the body.

Last of all is bringing-to-mind, or attention (*manasikāra*). This is what directs the mind to other objects or to the same one. Throughout early Buddhist texts, this bringing-to-mind is encouraged to be practiced wisely and judiciously (*yoniso manasikāra*). Some of these factors seem a little bit like mindfulness; identification, for instance, has the function of recognizing and basing its namings and labelings on memory. However, in this system, identification is regarded as slightly separate, supporting mindfulness and even being “cleaned out” by the practice of mindfulness and wisdom if a fixed view about a person or a thing is dissolved. So, it has a closely related but different function. Bringing-to-mind is also close, in some cases, to mindfulness, but it is the directing of the mind that is involved here, rather than the awareness of the field that the mind perceives. These factors are considered to be the base workings of consciousness in all beings: they keep the mind and consciousness going, whether in an animal, a human, or a being attaining awakening. Mindfulness itself is not on this list as a universal factor: it is considered to arise only in skillful consciousness and so transforms the way these factors work, but it does not supplant them.

Although all of these factors come together, we can see them also from a sutta perspective—that is, as a sequence. This is how it is usually taught in Southeast Asia, as a template for the way the mind knows and understands objects around. So, let us look at the process of waking up in the morning.

1. The first stirring from sleep is contact, as the mind senses, perhaps, light in the room.
2. The stage of feeling is the first response to the day—say, a pleasant sense that the dawn is coming into

the room.

3. Identification takes place as one wakes to the day.
4. The mind chooses a reaction to that: turning over and going back to sleep, or deciding to get up.
5. Concentration focuses that decision.
6. Life animates the decision—whether to go back to sleep or to get up.
7. One becomes fully conscious of what is going on around, and engages with the day.

We can see this example working clearly when some point in the process is interrupted or works oddly. Most people have had the experience of waking up in the middle of the night in a strange house, feeling a bit odd, and being unable to remember or identify exactly where one is and where the bed is in the room. The third stage struggles, as it is dealing with the unfamiliar. Or you might wake one morning with a very happy feeling and only after that remember it is the first day of your holiday—the second stage is strong. In Abhidhamma these “universals” occur together all of the time: in practice, as a sequence, one may predominate and be the one that is most evident. The list of universals is a helpful way of seeing human psychology and our encounters with the world as conscious beings from an experiential point of view. The example here also shows how much volition operates even in the first moments of the day: decisions are made as to whether to get up, and even whether to be cheerful about it, within seconds. This is where Abhidhamma helps, for with mindfulness the decisions will be helpful and will bring along other helpful factors too.

This is where mindfulness is so interesting in this psychological system. For, as we said before, mindfulness *only* occurs, in early Buddhism, in skillful consciousness. So, automatically, if there is mindfulness, there are other factors that support it, accompany it, and keep it going. These other factors may be weak, but

according to this theory, they will be there. If there is a bad mood, for example, and one is mindful of that, there will be, according to this system, some moments when the mind is skillful and has mindfulness and some moments where it does not. Certainly, the consciousness is unskillful at those moments, but mindful ones will gradually supplant it. While mindfulness is being established, the mind may move between the two, until, if you are lucky, it becomes predominantly skillful. So once the skillful mind has been repeated a few times, the Abhidhamma says that the mindful mind tends to sustain itself: repetition sustains it, and keeps its flow strong. The mind may lapse into unskillfulness sometimes, but that will be momentary if the wish to awaken skillfulness is strong. The unskillful mind is then not reinforced by repetition, and consciousness returns to balance and equilibrium with regard to the objects of the senses and the mind, the sixth sense in most forms of Buddhism.

What defines skillful consciousness? In all, there are twenty-five mental factors that accompany skillful consciousness; mindfulness is just one. Presented here in their respective groupings, they are:

#### The Beautiful

Faith

Mindfulness

Self-respect

Regard for consequence

Nongreed (equated with generosity)

Nonhate (equated with the divine abiding of loving kindness)

Equipoise (equated with the divine abiding of equanimity)

#### The Six Pairs

Stilling of mind and body

Lightness of mind and body

Softness of mind and body

Readiness of mind and body

Competence of mind and body

Straightness of mind and body

The Three Path Factors Associated with Morality

Refraining from wrong behavior of speech

Refraining from wrong behavior of body

Refraining from wrong behavior of livelihood

The Divine Abidings

Compassion

Sympathetic joy (or loving kindness, above, or equanimity, neutrality of feeling, which features as a universal)

Wisdom

Some other factors occur in some skillful states: thinking, examining, releasing onto the object, strength, joy, and purpose. These arise when the mind is particularly engaged in something that really commands our attention.

Most of the factors listed above arise together in any one situation, but the three path factors associated with morality, the divine abidings, and wisdom arise according to appropriateness to time and place or according to whether the person has developed it. Wisdom occurs for some people, but it may not be there in all those whose minds are skillful. Some factors never arise together but are rather one of a few animating features of any skillful consciousness, which may shape its identity in any moment. The divine abidings (*brahmavihāras*) arise singly, not altogether: the

consciousness will be colored by just one of them. Compassion does not arise in the same moment as sympathetic joy, or loving kindness (equated with “nonhatred”) in this system, nor does it arise in the same moment as equanimity (equated with “equipoise”) in this system. If one is experiencing compassion in a given situation, the other divine abidings will not be needed at that moment, but of course they may be needed afterward or before.

We can see the way in which such abidings arise using a simple example. Let’s say you go to meet a friend in a café and are very happy to see this person. Loving kindness may arise for a moment. You then hear of some problem that that person is experiencing and you discuss that with them: compassion becomes dominant. While speaking, the friend gets a text message and says that the problem has resolved itself in an unexpected and happy way, so sympathetic joy and relief arises. Then, after the friend has gone, you check your messages, look at the time, and get things together to go back to work. No particular response is required or needed then, so, if the skillful mind is present, equanimity arises. Neutral in itself, it simply does what is needed at the time, without hatred or a desire to rush things and get them over with.

This example, basic though it is, also shows that the divine abidings, in daily life, need sustaining by mindfulness too, in order to keep them on course and just to get things done. Mindfulness helps the appropriate abiding to arise, and, according to the theory, one always will arise when the mind is skillful. They require, at each stage, some mindfulness of feeling, some mindfulness of body, and some sense of mindfulness as a kind of basic memory to remind you of the various other things you had to take care of that day, to function in a healthy and flexible way. You need to pay for the tea, pay the bill, pick up all your belongings when you leave, and remember where you are going next;

these are all functions of mindfulness. Other factors that may not be themselves technically in the brief of mindfulness, like the divine abidings, still need it. In some sense, they should never be far from it and require its presence in order to function well as the time and situation demand.

The three path factors associated with morality can arise together, but if the agent is someone meditating, these may be replaced at that time by the three that are concerned more with meditation: in addition to mindfulness, there will be right effort and right concentration.

It is not an infallible system. Rather, it is intended to apply to most situations and to offer a vocabulary to explore mental states and ensure that the consciousness that arises at any time is indeed skillful rather than unskillful. The six pairs in the list that relate to mind and body are said to arise in all skillful consciousnesses in varying degrees. If there is a strong view in the mind, this, in the Abhidhamma system, is believed to affect the body too. If a rigidity of the mind and body is present, for example, the softness of mind and body is lost—and it is easy to see that the mind has become unskillful rather than skillful. If there is a heaviness or sluggishness in the mind, it arises in the body too. But if there is a sense of tranquility and restfulness in the meditation, the Abhidhamma says that the body and mind will both experience this. All of the six pairs become determinant features of skillful consciousness when the mind and body work well together, in meditation or daily life.

Mindfulness, though, occurs in all skillful states. There may be variables: the mind might be neutral or happy; there may be wisdom or there may not be, and the mind is still skillful. Consciousness may be spontaneous, or a mental state may arise through instigation, like when someone cheers you up. Compassion for others, equanimity, or another divine abiding may arise. A sense

of one's own worth and self-respect is balanced by a sense of care with regard to consequences. Throughout all of these, mindfulness is needed for the other qualities to be true, to sustain themselves, and to keep a wide field of attention so that the mind does not get stuck. The Abhidhamma definition of mindfulness is:

Whatever at that time is mindfulness, repeated mindfulness (*anussati*), guarding mindfulness (*paṭissati*), mindfulness as a shelter, as a sustainer, as a not-floating-off (*apilāpanatā*), as an absence of forgetfulness (*asammussasanatā*); mindfulness as a faculty, as a power, right mindfulness (path factor): this at that time is the faculty of mindfulness. (Dhs 11; Rhys Davids 1974)

This has been a technical chapter. It is hoped, however, that it shows how mindfulness was perceived as Buddhism developed and became systematized in the centuries after the Buddha's death. Abhidhamma tells us what is going on in our minds on a moment-by-moment basis; it describes what is there when human beings are mindful—and even animals sometimes, too. Mindfulness is seen as an integral part of the mind that is skillful and healthy (*kusala*). If not the same as factors such as self-respect and regard for consequences, it always brings them into play. It brings an intuitive ethical sense of the rightness of a particular action in a particular moment and in a particular situation.



## MAPS OF THE MIND

*Abhidharmakośa*

Another system of psychology emerges as Buddhism adapts in the centuries after the Buddha's death, reflecting profound changes in Buddhist thought and practice. As systems evolve—on the basis of meditation, adjustments to new cultures, or simply through new and inspirational ideas—core elements of the path start to look a little different. People start to be conscious of the needs for different things, which can have dramatically powerful effects on the way the mind is seen and on theoretical understandings associated with this. This does not mean necessarily that the methods of arousing the path are so fundamentally different, but ways of viewing it, directing it, encouraging it, and employing it may be seen from different angles.

The road simile is an obvious analogy. If you go by bike, you need to know the terrain of the road and the bits where it has potholes, slippery surfaces, and is likely to be strewn with rocks. If you go by car, some of these obstacles may not pose much of a problem at all, but other things might. So different methods and modes of travel, even on the same path, will require different ways of arousing attentiveness to events around. In addition, *how* something is described may itself be a skill-in-means, or a way of encouraging that quality, that is particularly adapted to a particular path—a very

important and often forgotten element in studying this subject. In Indian thought in the early centuries of the first millennium, ways of interpreting the nature of our experience and “reality” started to change.

As part of this, we look at another model, called an Abhidharma, the Sanskrit term for the same kind of text. In one key text, the *Abhidharmakośa*, mindfulness is described with a slightly changed role. The subject matter is, again, a little technical: comparison with the earlier system is helpful though, as it shows how two very closely related psychological models of the mind, both within Buddhism, perceive and describe *smṛti/sati* as operating differently. The changes are a reflection of a great creative upheaval known loosely as the Mahāyāna, which will be described more fully in the next chapter.

After the death of the Buddha, the tradition traveled, and a number of different types of Buddhism emerged. In Indian regions, where the Buddha had first taught, several Buddhist schools began to flourish, and there are other Vinayas, Suttas, and Abhidhamma from this area. We cannot be sure of dates, but by the early centuries of the Common Era there was an efflorescence of thinking and discussion with respect to how to practice the path, and new ways of articulating and re-creating Buddhist doctrine were emerging. Around the third century bce, various new strands of practice started to emerge within Buddhism. Over succeeding centuries, various schools started to articulate different understandings of the nature of reality and of the role of human beings within it. Several of these schools saw various elements of the Abhidhamma in a different way, focusing on technical but significant aspects of the teaching and giving them a new interpretation.

Of particular interest is the Sarvāstivāda school, which developed new theories of time as well as new theories relating to the nature of mind and matter in relationship to time. In line with contemporary trends in Indian

thought, Sarvāstivādins also placed a renewed emphasis on the purity and luminosity of the mind untroubled by the mental defilements, or stains (Sanskrit *kleśa*, Pāli *kilesa*). If the mind really was untainted, they felt, it could not have contact at all with defilements, as these taints could only be subsumed by contact with the mind's purity; if the taints remained impure, they would not be able to contact the pure mind in any way. So, it is the very fact that it is a constantly changing mind that is the source of all its defilements and taints. The bonds that bind the mind to these impermanent manifestations need breaking. Once these bonds are broken, the naturally liberated mind of arahatship immediately arises.

The factors that gave rise to such a change of view about the nature of the mind are manifold, but one key to such thinking has its origins in a statement from an early Buddhist text called the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*:

This mind, monks, is radiant, but is defiled by impurities which come as visitors from outside. (A 1.10)

The word for visitor, *agantuka*, is sometimes translated as “adventitious defilement.” Both translations suggest an underlying understanding: that defilements are not natural to the mind, but “visit” it as outsiders.

In Southern Buddhism this statement is supported by the presence of three active, skillful roots. These are possible and active in skillful *citta*, and accessible for humans. Some of the heavenly realms, the fourth jhāna (M 3.243), and the mind free from defilements (A 3.16–17) are described as radiant. The *bhavaṅga citta*, the consciousness of the human being in deep sleep or repose, such as at the end of each thought process, is a passive reflection of this. Luminous too, it does not have any active or karma-making properties but is rather the place where consciousness is restored to health.

In the early centuries of the first millennium, however, radiance, or luminosity, becomes central and is seen as the very nature of the purified mind. New verbs are employed: the Buddhist path is something to be uncovered, as much as developed, in the practitioner. Alongside this, there was a new emphasis on emptiness and on the supposition that the world around us is an illusion, a magical web of causes that separate us from perceiving the truth. Nāgārjuna (ca. 150–250 ce) argued that ultimate reality is not structured in terms of “things” but that our cognitive capacities are; this is the way the conventional world is created. There is, however, a world where such perceptions cannot hold, which operates entirely differently. For, he argued, all phenomena are inherently empty. This does not mean they are not experienced: rather, they are projections of consciousness, like a dream, and so are devoid of permanent or eternal substance. Such theories were deeply influential, not just in India but also in Buddhist movements that arose in subsequent centuries. Aspects of this will be explored further in the next chapter, but it was the notion of the illusoriness of phenomena, rather than the gradual building of skillfulness that had been understood in earlier traditions, that was key.

The Sarvāstivāda school arose in the midst of this new way of practice and thinking. The name translates as “those who expound the doctrine that all [times] exists”; they contested the position in Pāli Buddhism regarding the reality of time itself. In the Pāli Abhidhamma, the past and future were said not to exist, so that only the present had ontological status. The new school, in contrast, argued that there must be some sense in which both the past and the future do have a “real” status. The argument depended, in part, on the Abhidhamma notion that an object received at the sense-doors is then examined, investigated, and acted upon by the mind. The Sarvāstivādins argued that there must be some sense in which any object received by the senses could only be “in

the past.” Its influence on the present consciousness that receives and investigates it requires it to be a “past” event. But for the continuity of the thought process and the way consciousness passes through time, the object impinging on the senses must exert some sort of influence as a “present” reality. How could an orange taste like an orange if its orangeness did not have some present effect on the mind, even though the consciousness that tastes it arises afterward? Indeed, for continuity, and for the operation of karma over an extended time scheme, they felt that the past, and the future too, must be considered to have some ontological, though partial, status. All times then exist; our future and our past, as well as the present, have some qualified reality now. So where do memories exist? How does mindfulness operate within this? As we shall see, the questions had consequences for the way *smṛti* was understood and integrated into their larger system of routes to awakening.

The *Abhidharmakośa*, compiled in the fifth century ce and attributed by later generations to Vasubandhu, a fourth- or fifth-century monk from the Gandharan region, is crucial in expounding these new ideas. It has many points in common with the Pāli *Abhidhamma*. That is, the mode of elucidation by which questions are asked about specific items or groups follows some of the same patterns natural to an orally transmitted teaching, whereby questions are posed and answered by means of lists of attributes. Easily memorized, both texts are also considered in some sense meditative, exercises that challenge views. Their methods demand that what it is one becomes aware of, in events in the mind and body and in interactions with the world around, are grouped in different ways and from a variety of viewpoints. Sometimes one considers one aspect of the mind; sometimes another. Moving between these different groupings of mental factors allows the practitioner to see the mind in fluidly changing perspectives, thus arousing

a sense of nonself, in a calm and tranquil manner. And the issues addressed are questions that relate to the new preoccupations.

Pāli Abhidhamma had depended to a large degree upon the issue of skillfulness, or health of mind. It asked questions such as, When does skillfulness occur? How can it be identified? To what extent do meditation states and beings participate or have access to skillful states? How are they transcended in the moment of liberation?

The *Abhidharmakośa* is more interested in the inherent purity of the mind and the nature of the defilements that *prevent* the mind from finding the state of arahatship, the awakened mind. So the questions now asked are, How many faculties are pure? How many faculties participate in the unconditioned? It too is a way of exploring events, which the Sarvāstivādins felt had their own innate nature, in a kind of ongoing dialogue. Indeed, in time, such a mode of inquiry gradually reveals the workings—and indeed some innate paradoxes—of the system as a whole.

In both these Abhidhammas the process of systematization is interrogated. The exponent, going through the work either in discussion or in the chanting of the verses, is maneuvered into a position where he or she both questions, and sees differently, the way the mind itself labels events associated with the very basic phenomena that arise in the world around. The whole exercise becomes a living exposition of the doctrine, designed to inspire and encourage as well as explain. A musical analogy is apt: just as a meditative piece of music may examine, again and again, repetitive motifs, bringing them to different resolutions, so the Abhidhamma and the *Abhidharmakośa* examine factors in different ways, allowing the “notes” of the different mental states to form different patterns and different arrangements. The resolution occurs through contact with the unconditioned: this has its own rules. Like the

silence behind the notes, it is sensed more deeply through the play of different motifs, in always slightly different arrangements. Thus, the Sarvāstivādins start in a slightly different key, with different notes, and ask different questions: a new approach to silence is revealed, but it is arahatship that is suggested, made more present by the questions being posed.

This difference between the two has interesting effects on how mindfulness is presented. Firstly, the questions asked about it at the outset of the *Abhidharmakośa* nearly always refer to it as a faculty, where it is the central feature of the five faculties of meditation, faith, vigor, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. This occurs sometimes in the Pāli Abhidhamma (in that system it is primarily placed as one of the factors of skillful consciousness in daily life, meditation, and the attainment of path). Strikingly, however, the five faculties become the predominant setting for mindfulness in the *Abhidharmakośa*. There, they are constantly discussed together, like diamonds clustered in one setting. Purified mindfulness is seen primarily as an essential core element to the attainment of freedom and samādhi: its excellence lies, at its heart, in its role in meditation and in path attainment.

Mindfulness is perceived, when a faculty, as almost entirely pure and as participating in the unconditioned. As such, it is never to be abandoned. While there is some commentarial debate about this, the faculties are seen as not quite pure until full awakening, when they are transformed. When faith, vigor, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom become powers as well—the third grouping in the thirty-seven factors of awakening—they are predominant with regard to purification. It is through their power, and that alone, that the defilements are disturbed and the path is brought about. This is not that different from the way it is seen in the Pāli Abhidhamma, but the emphasis on these aspects is new.

Indeed, the system goes further than this, for, in this capacity, mindfulness is described as an enduring *dharma*, or entity, that will not be undermined, even by death. For the Sarvāstivādins, some features of the mind are “primary existents” (*dravyasat*), and in this system purified mindfulness becomes such.

There is always an inherent contradiction in any system that describes the world of events and appearances (or what one might term *phenomena*), the “real” unconditioned world (more like the *noumenon*), and the nature of any possible relationship between the two. Here, mindfulness—as a purified faculty and power—bridges that gap, as do the other four faculties: it is of quite a different order from other events occurring in the mind or in the physical world.

There is another interesting aspect to the way *smṛti* is described in the *Abhidharmakośa*, which gives an indication of the very new understanding of Buddhism developing in the new schools emerging at the time that give a new psychological perspective on the role of mindfulness. In the Southern Abhidhamma system, as we have seen, some features of the mind are said to arise in all consciousness, as “universal” factors that we all experience all the time: contact, feeling, identification, volition, life, concentration, and bringing-to-mind. All living beings have contact, feel, identify, have volition, life, and have minds that take one object; all advert their attention. A cat or a dog certainly experiences these universal features, for instance, all the time, just as human beings do. Such features characterize all consciousness, in whatever kind of being. Humans and, it is said, gods experience them too, and even those about to become awakened do too, with a consciousness that still has the universals (*mahābhūmikās*) present, underlying all its activities.

Mindfulness, in Pāli Abhidhamma, is not such a “universal.” Animals cannot access the thought processes



and states of mind of jhāna: a human or higher rebirth is needed for this. They can find moments of mindfulness, however, and demonstrate skillful consciousness, and so will have the same processing of an object that a human being would have, at the time that arises, even for just a few moments. The dog who alertly protects a child, out of loyalty to his master and family, may be mindful: it is his chance for a better rebirth too, in another life. In Pāli Abhidhamma, any moment of mindfulness is potentially contributing to liberation and is a path factor. The difficulty is that it cannot be found easily by those in bad states or by animals: it is not there anyway and needs development. The texts emphasize just how difficult it is for those in lower realms to access a human birth or for those in very bad human circumstances to find the level of mindfulness appropriate to the human: the struggle for survival, food, and shelter give little chance for moments of skillfulness. Encouragement, however, lies in the fact that the qualities said to be present at the time when it does arise *are exactly the same*, in a very dilute form, as some of the qualities that will be present at the moment of liberation. The path is present. Thus, in some indefinable way, so too is potential for the goal. So the system works through this liberating sense that if we can find skillful consciousness even for one moment, we can manage more.

In the *Abhidharmakośa*, however, entirely new notions of psychology are evident. According to their delineation, mindfulness occurs in *all* consciousness, of whatsoever kind, wherever it is. Indeed, it now becomes a defining feature of consciousness itself. Thus, the universal factors become the following:

1. Feeling (*vedanā*)
2. Volition (*cetanā*)
3. Identification/recognition (*samjñā/sam. jñāna*)
4. Willingness or purpose (*chanda*)
5. Contact (*sparśa*)

6. Wisdom (*prajñā*)
7. Mindfulness (*smṛti*)
8. Attention, or bringing-to-mind (*manasikāra*)
9. Commitment, or release-onto-the-object  
(*adhimukti*)
10. Concentration (*samādhi*)

This list in some ways looks the same as the Pāli list, though in a somewhat changed order. Six of these—feeling, volition, identification, contact, attention, and concentration—are found among the seven universal factors in the Theravāda list (unification is the word for “concentration,” here taken, as it is in the Pāli system, with *citt’ekaggatā/cittaikāgratā*, literally “gone to oneness”). Only one factor from the Pāli is absent: the life of the mind. This is related to the physical life, apparently, in this system, rather than an attribute of consciousness itself. Commitment (9) and willingness to act (4), occasional mental states in Pāli interpretations, are considered as arising in all consciousness in this system, as means of apprehending and responding to any object. This shows a slight shift in emphasis from the Pāli system, where they are found only in some specialized consciousness where the mind is more intensely focused, whether skillful or, if greed-based, unskillful. Most significantly, however, two factors that are only found in skillful or awakened consciousness in the Pāli system, mindfulness and wisdom, are here described as universally arising. The *Abhidharmakośa* says that mindfulness is “nonfailing with regard to the object; a dharma by virtue of which the mind does not forget the object, by virtue of which it cherishes it in order to express it (*abhilaṣatīva*).” Wisdom is termed here simply “discernment of dharmas.”

Clearly, there is a different view of the mind. Whereas in this system it is attention that “bends” or “applies” the mind to an object in any moment and identification that labels it, it is mindfulness that notes the object in the

first place. Something is going on all the time by which any object of the sense is in some way retained and registered; this is the function of what is termed *mindfulness* here. There is also something occurring that in some way discerns it or makes a discrimination: that is called wisdom.

Thus, one noteworthy feature of the difference between the Pāli Abhidhamma and the *Abhidharmakośa* is in the aspect of memory. Although the early Buddhists were not as interested in the operation of memory as modern-day psychologists are, there was some discussion about its nature and the way it worked in daily life.

The *Abhidharmakośa*, echoing the still-usual meaning of *smṛti* in Sanskrit in non-Buddhist texts, suggests that memory operates simply by the faculty of noting the object. What we note, we can, potentially, remember. If all times are present, then what is noted can always be remembered: mindfulness has access to all events and impressions that have been experienced by a particular being in a given lifetime. But what about the skillful mind? In the Southern Abhidhamma system, mindfulness is a defining feature of all skillful consciousness. But by making it a quality present in all beings, something else is needed to fulfill the role mindfulness assumes as part of the “beautiful” mental states of skillful consciousness: some other quality needs to be suggestive of the care needed for the practice of the path. In the *Abhidharmakośa*, this part is taken by diligence (*apramāda*; *appamāda*). This term, which we met in chapter 4, is often associated with mindfulness in all Buddhist texts. Here, it is the kind of careful awareness of events in the present that in time allows the purified mindfulness to emerge and participate in the unconditioned.

It is in the universality of wisdom and mindfulness, however, that the *Abhidharmakośa* system reflects the

most radical changes in Indian thought. In the Pāli system, the eightfold path had been the bridge describing the mental factors that “cross” the gulf between the conditioned world and the transcendent. Mindfulness is one of these factors, and so the sati that arises in an odd moment of skillful consciousness is described in identical terms as that which is there at the moments of path. The swan who cares for her young may, for a moment, experience skillful consciousness and mindfulness; so may a human being acting kindly or selflessly; so may a meditator as he or she prepares for arahatship. *Jātakas*, the stories of the Buddha’s past lives, illustrate these possibilities too, with their endless tales of animals behaving kindly and of humans finding skillfulness in all sorts of trades and crafts. Here, the mindfulness is the same, as is the skillful consciousness. It is just less intense or well established. Mindful consciousness is not there all the time; it is only there when the mind is skillful.

The *Abhidharmakośa*, however, sees mindfulness as having two possibilities: when purified, it is a faculty (where it can participate in the unconditioned); when tainted, it has its everyday manifestation, as a universal feature. Here, it is often defiled, but it is present in all consciousness. The same differentiation applies to wisdom too. A small difference, apparently, but a significant one. For it now suggests that all beings, however low in the scale of species, with whatever consciousness that is present, have these two crucial qualities, mindfulness and wisdom, all of the time. They may be troubled and tainted, but they are hardwired into any consciousness that arises and can be purified. The inherent capacity for awakening in all beings is always there. New among the emergent Buddhisms is the suggestion that mindfulness is an essential aspect of our buddha nature, still impure when we are in bad states (or often impure in the case of animals) but nonetheless

capable of finding knowledge and liberation if purified into a factor on the path.

Mindfulness does not suddenly change in this new system. It is just described as having different levels and properties. Such a description reflects the wave of interest in new developments about the mind and the path that were becoming so important at the time. Mindfulness finds a new expression, and different questions are asked about it. Both the Pāli system and the *Abhidharmakośa* say that mindfulness is the factor that experiences the path and nirvana. Now, awakening is considered to be of the very nature of the four foundations of mindfulness, found through the elimination of obstructions. The *Abhidharmakośa* states that the recollection of our past lives, the recollection of the past lives of others, and the complete destruction of the corruptions have, of their very nature, these four foundations. Mindfulness is not one therapeutic tool: it is the means by which the Buddha exercises his compassion and a defining feature of awakening itself. The ability to know all worlds, and the past, future, and present, is an outflow of this. Awareness over all worlds and all times represents the highest manifestation of mindfulness, demonstrated in a completely awakened Buddha.

The intention here is not to say that the two Abhidharmas are in some way contradictory or that they are assuming radically opposing stances. On the contrary, most of the time they agree; the “building blocks” within the mind change little. But they both make pathways for the exercise of mindfulness in different ways, to encourage a process whereby the mind does not cling to ideas, labels, and classifications in any sense. Both systems use questioning itself as part of a salvific path, purifying view, softening stubbornness and dogmatism of mind, and loosening a sense of “self” and ownership. Groupings are posited, then seen in a

different way; lists are made, then questioned from a different angle. If we look at philosophies solely from the intellectual level, contradictions emerge, as they seem to be intended to do. The mind somehow tries to do something it always does—and then it fails. These psychological systems need to be seen themselves as part of the salvific path, as indeed they appear to have been regarded: a way of purifying and clearing the minds of those who can benefit from them.

Abhidhamma/Abhidharma does not appeal to everyone and has perhaps always only been suited just to some. But it was intended as a system to be used as a practical guide, and it is understood that way within those traditions that employ it now. We can see it as a means of ensuring that the mind itself is exercised and that the basic categories it imposes through various identifications are challenged and made pliable. Like a kind of aerobics for the mental processes, it can free them from fixed views: an opening of the third foundation of mindfulness into the fourth and a new perception of things as they are.

The *Abhidharmakośa* was highly influential in the new Buddhisms. It was disseminated widely among Indian Buddhist schools first, and then, over the next centuries, became popular in China, Korea, Japan, and Tibet. In the next chapter we look more closely at the movements that lay behind these waves of transmission and influence and how Buddhism started to evolve and change in different places and at different times.

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## MAHĀYĀNA

So what is the new movement that colored the emergence of the Abhidharma system discussed in the last chapter? In the centuries after the Buddha's death, the absence of the great teacher created a kind of space. New formulations of doctrines were, in time, inevitable, following the example of such a deeply creative founder, who encouraged his followers to be creative too. In the regions of South and Southeast Asia, a number of schools flourished, differing on doctrinal points and matters of monastic practice. In India, new schools of thought evolved, rearticulating Buddhist principles and practices in many different ways. And as these new approaches emerged, so too did fresh texts, the products of the atmosphere of debate, meditation practice, and experimentation that the Buddha's teachings had inspired. To accommodate and even legitimize this activity, notions started to develop which asserted that the Buddha could have left other teachings, or that some teachings could have been hidden in caves or underground until such time as they were needed. Indeed it was felt some teachings could be revealed for the first time, in dreams, visions, or deep meditation.

Mahāyāna, or the "Greater Vehicle," arose in India sometime between 150 bce and 100 ce as part of the spread of Buddhism and the transformations it underwent as practitioners and scholars found new ways of approaching the Buddha's teachings. Inscriptional evidence and the reports of early Chinese pilgrims

suggest that, at first, the Mahāyāna was not widespread. But Buddhism, although never a missionary religion, from the outset, traveled—to Parthia, Central Asia, the Silk Roads, China, various Southeast Asian regions, and, in time, to Korea, Mongolia, Japan, and Tibet. Over the centuries, as Buddhism moved to new regions, the Mahāyāna became the predominant tradition of much of Asia, in numerous different forms. It took varied manifestations at different times, and hence, as successive excursions out of India took the traditions to new regions, in those places where Buddhism took root and subsequently developed its own forms and styles, living traditions emerged, with significant adaptations to local practices, customs, and theory bases. There are some important early figures associated with the Mahāyāna movement, such as Nāgārjuna, mentioned before, and Aśaṅga (ca. fourth century ce).

But the movement is not associated with any particular school or individual and in some ways is not even entirely definable. Rather, it demonstrates a number of characteristics that mark out its literature, practices, rituals, and doctrines. Any one of these features may not be necessarily peculiar to the movement, but together they assume great importance and significance as animating principles and styles in the waves of transmission. There is now an emphasis on emptiness, on the spaciousness of a teaching whereby all beings show the potential for awakening, and, in particular, on a completely new formulation of the bodhisattva vow, now enjoined for all beings. The Greater Vehicle is shot through with new and expansive developments in thinking and practice from the centuries after the Buddha's death, and it provides an instantly recognizable movement, which, over time, became immensely popular in the following centuries.

Mahāyāna assumed varied forms: new theories of the mind, of the possible unreality of the physical world, of



the capacities of beings, and even of the nature of time itself were all tested and questioned as part of the increased emphasis on emptiness. Matter had been considered “real” in early Buddhism; now, in some forms, it was not, nor even was the mind. Traditional ways of understanding the relationship between mind and matter and between conventional truth and ultimate truth were challenged and brought to new perspectives. Devotion, prostrations, offerings, and a willingness to surrender notions of ego through such activities, often a part of Buddhist activity in earlier times too, became more pronounced and formalized within the context of the bodhisattva vow. Literary features such as hyperbole, emotional expressiveness, and a great imaginative outflow and expansiveness accompanied the movement, making its key texts immediately arresting and inspiring. Buddhism, as a result of this, adapted radically to new environments and new people. At the center of these transformations were new perspectives on the ancient bodhisattva vow and on the requirement of the commitment to release all beings from the cycles of samsara, the wandering through countless lives.

The Pāli tradition had suggested three lineages or personal approaches to practice: of the *arahant*, the one who becomes awakened through hearing the teaching; the *paccekabuddha*, the one who becomes awakened through their own efforts; and the *bodhisatta* path, for the rare one who wishes to find again the path and teach it to those beings who will understand it, as a fully awakened Buddha. In Southern Buddhist texts all lineages do some teaching. Arahants teach with new similes and methods in the suttas and are congratulated by the Buddha for doing so. They also have quite individual styles, expressive of the great range of characters in the early Sangha, as well as many routes that the Buddha sanctions on the path to awakening. Paccekabuddhas pop up everywhere in jātaka stories, tales of the Buddha’s past lives, giving him advice,

teaching in riddles, and embodying awakening at times when there is no Buddhist path. Paccekabuddhas just do not teach a full path.

The Buddha, in Southern Buddhism as in others, reformulates the entire path, as the culmination of a bodhisatta (Sanskrit *bodhisattva*) journey through many lifetimes and modes of existence preparing for this task. Now, in varied forms, the first two lineages are considered less worthy and, indeed, are often discredited; the bodhisattva path and postponing one's own awakening for the benefit of all sentient beings is a commitment encouraged for all beings. It is perhaps most succinctly expressed in the words of Śāntideva in the eighth century:

As long as space abides, and as long as the world  
abides, so long may I abide,

destroying the sufferings of the world. (Crosby and  
Skilton 1996, 143)

The underlying difference in orientation between these newly emerging schools and the Southern ones is not in the bodhisattva vow itself. Rather, it is in the fact it was now recommended as a goal for all meditators, not just for a minority.

It should be stressed again that mindfulness in general and as a practice does not somehow change amid these new perspectives. Attentiveness to bodily awareness, feeling, the tone and nature of the mind and of events: these are still encouraged, and for each there is still the direction to be aware within, without, and both within and without. The domains of these four foundations of mindfulness still pertain and are still taught and encouraged. To put it in modern terms, one still has to remember where the car is parked, to be aware of basic bodily movements, and to notice when the feeling tone has become unhappy or cheerful. The way the four foundations of mindfulness are presented, however, is

informed by changed views about what exactly they are and why one should be undertaking these mindfulnesses in the first place. What is the nature of mindfulness for one who has taken the bodhisattva vow? What if the domains that are gradually dissolved, in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*, to a sense of nonself and impermanence, are in reality somewhat different from the way they are described in early Buddhism? And then the question is raised as to what exactly one is arousing mindfulness for, when one looks at the body, the feelings, the mind, and events. If it is primarily to fulfill a bodhisattva path, it appears this affects how mindfulness can be cultivated and casts the ways that one can see these domains of body, feelings, minds and events in an entirely new light.

One feature, for instance, of Indian Buddhism, so deeply influential as Buddhism traveled, is the notion of the luminosity of the mind, discussed in the last chapter. Pāli Buddhism had interpreted this as a quality of mind that might be present in passive form in deep sleep or at the end of each thought process and reawakened through the practice of skillful consciousness and meditation. It required skillful consciousness in daily life and meditation alongside the practice of wisdom to be rediscovered and developed.

While an assumed background to so much early Buddhist theory, the nature of this luminosity is not examined. New theories of Buddhist psychology, however, accompanied the Indian developments. That the mind is naturally radiant assumes a central part of doctrine and instructions for practice, and the way this luminosity is seen as latent in all beings. It is also equated with the Mahāyāna notion of emptiness and the idea that the buddha nature is not something found but is natural to all beings, covered up and obscured by illusion, appearance, and defilements. This is interpreted in various ways by different schools. The

*Abhidharmakośa* had some positions more like the Theravāda, in that this state is only found through gradual purification; it is articulated within the notion that an ethical dimension is constantly underlying this process. The path is, in a way, created or cleared by the practitioner. But it had also argued that such a radiant mind cannot be defiled; it is the constantly evolving mind that is defiled, and once these hindrances and taints have been eradicated, this purity is rediscovered or found. In this system, mindfulness, when purified, is deathless, an aspect of luminosity.

Other schools rejected notions of contamination and purification, maintaining that the luminosity of the mind is innate and needs to be rediscovered. It is defined as abiding in nonduality. The very movement to duality is itself inextricably linked to illusion; ignorance and defilements create and sustain this illusion. Consciousness needs to be cleansed of its discursive misconceptions but also to find its pristine potential and what is considered to be its true nature, beyond conditions. All conceptual polarities are then eliminated, and the practitioner obtains Buddha attributes (*buddhadharma*) in order to benefit all sentient beings. Another notion, that the luminous mind is an element of the *tathāgatagarbha*, the “womb” or “embryo” of buddhahood in all beings, emerges. Some schools, such as the Yogācāra, say the memory of all our experience, in the absence of a “real” nature of events past, present, and future, lies in what is known as a substratum or “storehouse” (*ālayavijñāna*) of all one’s memories, one’s *karma*, the “perfumes” of past actions, and the seeds (*bījas*) of future actions. These qualities will be purified by awakening, when the radiant mind is released from all obstructions. A rich repertoire of images, often deriving from fertility and growth, reflect the inevitable paradox of expressing the relationship between the awakened mind and the nonawakened, the conditioned and the unconditioned, the illusory and the real. The storehouse,

the seedbed, the “womb” of the buddha nature all show ways that this latent propensity in all beings to find awakening can somehow coexist with the world of illusions and defilements.

Mahāyāna and the Diamond Vehicle, the Vajrayāna, a movement identified with the tantras, give theories of consciousness based then on luminosity: when the mind is free from all taints, there is “no-mind,” an undifferentiated and immutable mind, just as the thirty-seven factors of awakening are too.

One text, the *Bhadrapāla-sūtra*, explains its position through metaphors: just as the air element is formless and imperceptible, sensed only when it shakes through wind, trees, and leaves, or blows warm or cold air, so consciousness accomplishes all forms and penetrates all things but is not of them or in them. The *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* equates *tathāgatagarbha* with store consciousness, the underlying stratum of luminosity in all beings. This buddha nature is disguised in all beings, like a jewel wrapped in dirty cloth. It is enveloped by the five aggregates of body, feeling, identifications, formations, and consciousness; it is stained with greed, hatred, and delusion and sustained by false imagination as to the nature of reality. The Tantra, whose practices involved complex visualizations of the Buddha and of bodhisattvas as a means of finding again the luminosity of the mind, said that Śākyamuni Buddha, the historical Buddha, found awakening through visualizing his mind as a lunar disc and through five mystical realizations. This disc epitomizes the knowledge that is innately luminous. So just as the waxing moon gradually emerges in its fullness, the mind jewel also emerges in its perfected state. Separated from the clouds of illusion and the stains of defilements, this mind jewel appears as the perfected Buddha qualities. It is from this that the now popular visualizations of deities emanate.

But these are not just theories. These movements were accompanied by great meditative exploration as well, and the wealth of illustrative visual imagery, often derived from phenomena such as the moon and the sun, jewels, and paradisiacal backgrounds, suggests that these are reflections of that too, and from insights derived in or after various stages of deep *śamatha*, or calm meditation. Amid this thinking, and a new trend to active visualization as a means of discovering the union of wisdom and skill-in-means, mindfulness itself is seen in a radically different perspective, with, again, often beautiful images suggesting its centrality and power in the mind. Fully perfected, it is deathless, immutable, and an intrinsic aspect of the innate luminosity of the mind. The *bodhicitta*, the mind on its way to buddhahood, has to involve mindfulness, though various schools frame its development and cultivation in a variety of ways. When the bodhisattva vow is undertaken, the conventional bodhicitta stores up merit and wisdom; the transcendent bodhicitta denotes the ultimate insight into the illusoriness and emptiness of all phenomena.

Thus mindfulness, within the parameters of the bodhisattva vow, starts to be seen with new emphases. While the underlying doctrines suggest an uncovering, or a freeing from illusion, the practice of mindfulness becomes linked to this sense of the mind of the practitioner dedicated to the service of all sentient beings. In this regard, active functions suggested by the repeated mindfulnesses in early Buddhist texts also become increasingly prominent but in slightly different form. The practitioner, for instance, is encouraged to be mindful of the creatures in all worlds, known and unknown, as being fully capable of finding awakening. In the midst of all the situations with which we have daily contact, there is, in all of the beings encountered, a capacity to find complete awakening too. An element of this has always been present in Buddhism—with Piṅgiya, for instance, who is mindful of the Buddha and his

teachings day and night (see chapter 4). Now, faith, or trust, that all beings are capable of attaining the bodhisattva ideal, increasingly becomes the foundation for the establishing of mindfulness. Awareness of the potential buddha nature in other beings becomes the starting point for observation; an increasing mindfulness in the practitioner becomes a necessary concomitant of the fulfillment of the bodhisattva vow.

The use of depth of feeling, commitment, and faith as a means to arouse mindfulness might seem strange to modern readers who are familiar with more secular and even prosaic introductions to arousing this quality. Most teachers and therapists now encourage the practice of mindfulness through, say, being aware of bodily movements, of the arising of different feelings at different times, and of the various mental states that accompany changed moods and situations. These very immediate and often bodily awareness techniques are still practiced, of course, in all forms of Buddhism, but the starting point becomes, in some traditions, slightly different. Devotion and ritual, so memorable in themselves as symbolic enactments of mental and emotional transformation, meditation, and other aspects of *bhāvanā*, such as chanting and offering food to the monastic community, were already stressed; they now become key.

If this seems mystifying to those interested in mindfulness from a secular point of view, some simple analogies from our own basic experience help here. What is it we are mindful of and tend to remember in our daily lives? Someone who loves birds and wildlife inevitably notices if a heron or great-crested grebe happens to alight nearby while they are walking by a river. In this case, the love of the creatures has inspired an interest, and the bird-lover is awake and mindful to those things that fall into that field. Where there is feeling, there is a good chance of interest, commitment, and a greater

possibility of alertness. So, at major life changes, we can also feel the arising of feeling awakening an interested alertness. Children starting school become aware of other children and things associated with their new environment. Each woman who becomes pregnant comes to a realization that she has entered a world full of parents. Women everywhere either appear pregnant, have been pregnant, are trying to be pregnant, or have children now. It is as if she has gone through a kind of initiation: the mind, attuned to new birth, feels it going on all around, and these things are just noticed because of the feeling that this state has produced. Motherhood stops being an abstract concept and becomes something to be known and experienced oneself. The practitioner committing to the bodhisattva vow is entering such a new world. One is surrounded by beings also capable of finding awakening, who may themselves be bodhisattvas even if they do not know it and who are all on individual paths, realizing that potential in ways we do not recognize or understand.

### *A GUIDE TO THE BODHISATTVA WAY OF LIFE*

The Madhyamaka school was founded by Nāgārjuna, who argued that the true middle way of the Buddha lay in seeing that everything was empty of both inherent nature and inherent independent existence. Emptiness doctrine, in some form or another, characterizes all the Madhyamaka schools. A number of scholars and practitioners were involved in the emergence of the methodology and arguments of these schools: Dignāga (ca. 480–540), Candrakīrti, in the late seventh century; and Śāntideva (ca. 685–763), who composed one of the most beautiful, lyrical, yet uncompromising poems in the Buddhist tradition on the bodhisattva path—*A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life (Bodhicaryāvatāra)*.

In this deeply influential work, Śāntideva introduces the key doctrine of the exchange of self and others. One



should protect others as one would protect oneself, for no one “owns” suffering, and the one who experiences it is always worth our attention. So, in this context, one sees the world as if one were the other suffering person and realizes that the suffering of this person cannot be understood as separate from that which is experienced oneself. This leads, in time, to the “great compassion,” whereby the suffering of all beings becomes one’s prime concern, over and above even any individual intent for salvation. The bodhisattva vow informs many doctrines of this period, and it is hardly surprising that it affects in some ways how mindfulness is seen too. “My suffering” is not, in the end, different from “your suffering,” in meditation at least: the boundaries have dissolved.

Śāntideva was a monk at the famed Nālandā University in India. His *Bodhicaryāvatāra* explores the bodhisattva ideal, and the verses may be seen as the articulation of a somewhat changed model of the way mindfulness is seen and understood as part of a doctrinal and practice tradition. Indeed, one can see his doctrine of the exchange of self for others as a different application of mindfulness: to the fact that beings are equal and that the suffering of one “I” is just a drop in the ocean of infinite “I’s” that populate the universe. Thus, one can extend the field of awareness to include this infinite ground of beings and develop a kind of mindfulness applied to that domain. The suffering of this ocean of beings is more important than that experienced by oneself; mindfulness of this is an inevitable product of the great compassion of the bodhisattva vow. Happiness arises because the object of attention is no longer oneself but all beings; unhappiness arises when one’s own desire for happiness has taken control.

Crucial to this work is the famous ninth chapter: the subject of so many commentaries, debates, and discourses and so influential in Tibet in shaping the philosophies of Madhyamaka as well as Cittamātra, a

system based on the primacy of the mind. Sophisticated, intensely analytical, and penetrating, it argues the difference between conventional truth and ultimate truth, maintaining through its own logic that all the things we regard as so important have no inherent essential nature: they are empty. Nothing exists without a cause, nor is anything contained within individual or combined causes; nothing has come from anything else, remains, or goes. Therefore, the whole of our experienced universe has never really come into existence or ceased: it is unreal.

In verses 57–105, Śāntideva examines the four foundations of mindfulness. They are framed very differently from their presentation in early Buddhist texts; the whole orientation has now shifted. The questions asked and received about these domains are startling: this is an exercise in an examination of categories rather than the more immediate “labeling” and experiencing of the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*. Analytical questions are asked as the mind is challenged at the very level at which it constructs its labels and the means by which it does so. The assumptions by which we categorize our basic experience of body, feeling, mind, and events are, the text argues, untenable. Thus, the verses enact the doctrine of emptiness, placing the practitioner in a position whereby no permanent or stable ground is possible. With respect to the body, the text asks, Is the body in the hands or the feet? Can it exist independently of its parts? Likewise, where are the hands? Are they in the fingers? According to verse 82:

The body is not inside. It is not outside. How can the body be in the hands and other parts?

It is not separate from the hands and the parts. How then, is it to be found? (Crosby and Skilton 1996, 123)

Do they or anything else have independent existence? Verse 86 explains:

Even the constituents can be analyzed down to atoms. The atom too can be divided according to the directions. The division of a direction, since it is without parts, leaves space. Therefore, the atom does not exist. (Crosby and Skilton 1996, 124)

In the area of feelings, a comparable scrutiny is attempted. How can suffering be said to exist without an object that exists? The argument moves to consciousness and dharmas. For how can there be an experiencer of that object if it does not exist? And, given that objects cannot have contact with one another in space, how can the object that is experienced be “real” if it is not perceived at the same time, the present, as the mind that arises that experiences it? In the area of the mind, who is the experiencer, and what is the object? How can the consciousness that experiences it be real? As the argument moves to cause, operating in time, the fourth foundation of mindfulness, of events, becomes fluidly elusive, moving and changing all the time. Whatever the philosophical basis, we are required to investigate the framework of our world and let it dissolve. Emptiness becomes a lived experience, inherent in the answers to the questions posed by the poem.

Here, it should be remembered that this chapter, challenging the truth behind conventional truths, occurs at the culmination of a series of stages making the practitioner strong for wisdom. The book is often discussed on its own, but its own momentum requires that the content of what comes before is understood, appreciated, and practiced first. Śāntideva, living in a busy monastery, would have kept a steady routine and practice to keep him “down-to-earth.” At the outset of the work, bodhi-citta is invoked and praised. The basis has been prepared by the free confession of faults so that there is no unhappiness or guilt surrounding the practitioner, who can then move on to the adoption of the awakening mind and a steady establishment in its

guarding. Only then are the six “perfections”—generosity, morality, forbearance, vigor, meditation, and wisdom—described and aroused.

The word *apramāda* (Pāli *appamāda*), “awakeness” or “diligence,” is used for the protection of this awakening mind. Not the same as mindfulness, as we have seen in earlier chapters, it is a fairly constant companion: the term suggests the great care with the way the mind reacts to and responds to objects, to other beings, and to oneself, helped in its job by mindfulness, which accompanies it at all times. Again, clear comprehension, termed “awareness” below, is another usual accompaniment, as in earlier Buddhist texts, giving mindfulness context and purpose and steering it according to what is necessary at the time. The practitioner will keep his feet well on the ground, even though that ground might not, in the end, be “real”! Powerful devotion and awareness of the potential buddhahood in all beings around encourage him or her then to advert to and adhere to mindfulness on all occasions. Śāntideva’s words on mindfulness from the fifth chapter are then memorably complete:

### *Awareness and Mindfulness*

I make this salutation with my hands to those who  
wish to guard their mind. With all your effort,  
guard both mindfulness and awareness.

Just as a man weak with illness is not fit for any work,  
so a mind distracted from these two is not fit for  
any work.

What is heard, reflected upon, or cultivated in  
meditation, like water in a leaky jar, does not stay  
in the memory of a mind which lacks awareness.

Many, though learned, possessing faith, and though  
absorbed in effort, are befouled by offences due to  
the fault of lacking awareness.

Though they have amassed meritorious deeds, they end up in an evil realm, plundered by the thief, lack of awareness, who comes after the theft of mindfulness.

This band of robbers, the defilements, seeks out a point of access. When it has found one, it plunders and destroys life in a good realm.

Therefore mindfulness should never be taken from the door to the mind, and, if it does go, it should be reinstated, remembering the torment of hell.

Mindfulness comes easily to those fortunate people who practice wholeheartedly, through the instruction of their preceptor, because they live with their teacher, and out of fear.

The Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have unobstructed vision in all directions. Every single thing is before them. Before them I stand.

Meditating thus, one should remain possessed of shame, respect, and fear. One should recollect the Buddhas in this way at every moment.

Awareness comes and, once come, does not go again, if mindfulness remains at the door to the mind in order to act as a guard...

One should think of nothing else other than that which one has decided to undertake, with heart fully involved there, until it is completed.

For in this way everything is done well...

(*Bodhicaryāvatāra* verses 23–33 and 43–44;  
Crosby and Skilton 1996, 36–38)

Here too, the term *anusmṛti*, or repeated mindfulness, is linked inextricably to the notion of *smṛti* itself. Devotion, preliminary ritual, and the confession of faults encourage and make the practitioner more aware: of the buddha fields that surround him or her and of the possibility of finding opportunities to practice the

bodhisattva ideal in every moment. From here, it is possible to develop the perfections of the bodhisattva as described in this system. The sequence is of a kind that builds immense emotional strength, alertness, cheerful willingness to endure, and deep meditation, in which the heart and mind are calmed and brought to peacefulness. It is then, and only then, that each of the four foundations of mindfulness is seen as pertaining to fields that are inherently “empty.”

The discrimination that perceives and knows this is not a different mindfulness, but it is certainly expressed in a challenging, creative, and, in the end, optimistic way. We are the architects of our own karma. Śāntideva’s work does not fudge the pain and unhappiness experienced by so many beings so much of the time. Despite the ocean of our own and others’ suffering in which we are in the midst, the bodhisattva ideal helps us to find mindfulness through this, in every moment.

As an illustration of the context for Śāntideva’s verses, the “twelve mindfulneses” he gives to avoid “fruitless waste” in chapter 10 of *The Training Anthology* (*Śikṣasamuccaya*), a manual for novice monks, ensure that the mindfulness still involves remembering others around. The novice is mindful of the Buddha’s laws and needs to remember, whatever the meditation, that each person has an enduring body, character, and essential nature. He can be mindful that he can move the body when there is fear or joy, mindful of the four postures of standing, sitting, walking, and lying down, and mindful that good posture is possible. He remembers to ensure his face, hand, or body gestures are not unpleasant when talking, speaking in a middle pitch, not too high or low. He binds the “elephant of the heart” to the “post of quiet”; he examines his heart and keeps these mindfulneses even in a large assembly. So, mindful of care of himself and others, he is generous and restrained. As Śāntideva concludes this passage, a bodhisattva

should be like a servant, asking himself what needs to be done for all beings.

Mindfulness is seen throughout all Buddhisms as arising and needing other qualities: it requires awareness (in the older terms of the Pāli texts) of within, of without, and of both within and without. Here, its field is specifically applied to beings. It states what is suggested in earlier Buddhisms: the mindfulness that accompanies the heart and mind of one who has taken the bodhisattva vow needs to be aware of others and of the fact that each being has their own path too.

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## CHINA AND EAST ASIA

Buddhism reached Chinese regions early: because of the Chinese love of writing, there is evidence for the translation of Buddhist texts by the first century ce. Most of the texts discussed so far were translated over the next few hundred years and, while the subject is still highly debated, it is sometimes argued that Chinese versions, because they were written down, may be earlier than those of the Southern schools. Buddhism reached China through merchants, monks, and travelers on the arterial network of roads and tracks now known as the Silk Road. It continued to travel there in waves over the next few hundred years, as the texts, practices, and customs of different popular movements in India were transported to various Chinese regions.

From the outset, the notion of mindfulness and meditation were popular. Preexisting practices, particularly in the system later described as Daoism, also employed, for instance, breathing practices and awareness of the bodily energies, so these seemed important and natural. An Shigao, a Buddhist Parthian prince, introduced texts and practices at the Han capital, and there is a version of the *Breathing Mindfulness Sūtra* (*Ānāpānasmṛti-sūtra*) dating from 148 ce.

In contrast to the later, highly systematic translation work of Tibet, there is also some freedom of movement and experimentation in Chinese translations. The texts that were translated were usually from Sanskrit, and



these translations sometimes displayed new elements. It is possible, in many cases, that they retained elements that were later lost in Indian transmissions. The famous pilgrim Faxian (338–422) brought back texts and Vinaya from India, and a Central Asian monk, Kumārajīva (344–413), was responsible for overseeing numerous translations of imported texts. Translation bureaus were established as texts from a number of different schools arrived and needed to be made available in Chinese. While these texts were usually faithful to the Sanskrit, from the outset, new elements were introduced. One early translation of the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*, for instance, includes the differentiation between sweet and sour among elements of taste under practices having to do with the body—the basics of Chinese culinary experience are integrated straight away into this first foundation of mindfulness! Alongside the gradual assimilation of Indian texts and practices, China also saw the development of a number of schools within its own regions, shaped by the demands of the people, the time, and the place.

As Buddhism became established in China, it formed, over centuries, relationships with preexisting traditions, such as Daoism and Confucianism, as well as with the waves of texts arriving from India throughout the first part of the first millennium. In addition to texts, meditation practices, techniques, and methods from India were also imported. Some evolved in this new context, while some retained both their style and methodology. The situation was complex, and over a period of time a number of Chinese Buddhisms (or, one could say, Eastern Buddhisms) emerged, for Korea, Japan, and Vietnam also developed their own Buddhisms on the basis of their contact with China. These Buddhisms, again, frequently displayed new developments in technique, theory, and method.

Some features of Indian Buddhism were highly popular in China, such as meditation, but some seemed odd. A few examples illustrate some of the difficulties the Chinese encountered. For instance, the Confucian and Daoist traditions, and, indeed, even the language, did not place an emphasis either on the first person or on the “subject” in speech. Confucian notions of the self—seen as part of a larger whole—and the fact that one’s cultural orientation was so based on familial and social thinking did not encourage an individualist sense of one’s “self” as a separate entity. The notion that one even had a “self” to abandon was puzzling. A strong cultural ethos for reverence to ancestors also meant that heavenly realms were seen differently, as places where one could join one’s relatives and wait for the time of another Buddha. Other often creative tensions arose from the need to support monastics. The Chinese did not share India’s tradition of respect for the mendicant holy man and firmly believed everyone should work hard and earn their food. All of these features shaped the settling of Buddhism in these regions, often with interesting results. So, while many doctrines, texts, practices, and, particularly, meditative and mindfulness exercises remain much the same in East Asian Buddhism, important new developments changed the theory and the practice of mindfulness. New techniques, monastic customs, and patterns of behavior in the laity needed somewhat changed exercises, chants, and practices to be aroused in daily life.

In time, four schools of Buddhism emerged: the Pure Land, the Tiantai, the Huayan, and the Chan. These all, in various ways, spread to other parts of East Asia and were modified too by developments there. This chapter simply gives a brief account of some of the developments that are of particular interest for the subject of this book.

## DEVOTION AND PURE LAND

As in India at this time, in China devotion leading to mindfulness often becomes a formula for daily and personal practice, explained through texts introduced by subsequent visitors and pilgrims. Lokakṣema introduced the *Sūtra on the Concentration for Encountering Face-to-Face the Buddhas of the Present (Pratyutpanna-Samādhī-sūtra)* around 179 ce, which described the practice of being aware of bodhisattvas in all directions. This anusmṛti, or repeated mindfulness or recollection, extends the traditional recollection of the Buddha found in Pāli texts, so that it becomes an exercise to be undertaken at all times. There are 290 texts in Chinese that discuss Amitāyā, the Buddha of the Pure Land, for instance. In the following passage, Hānshān Déquing (1546–1623) praises the power of simply recollecting the name of the Buddha, at all times:

If you recite the buddha's name in your mind repeatedly and without interruption, so that your deluded thoughts vanish, your mind's light is manifested, and your wisdom appears, then you will become a buddha's dharma body. (Eifring 2015, 112)

A number of factors over the following centuries influenced these recollection practices, which became widespread. Firstly, China had a vast peasant base, with many struggling in poverty and having little time to visit temples, take part in devotional outings, or go on meditative retreats. Some had long-established codes and practices; hard physical work would, one suspects, have provided many people with a very good grounding in the body, and the Confucian ethic of respect for one's family and society would have ensured a code of conduct that supported orderly and proper behavior as an ideal.

But the emotional base, and the sense of yearning for a haven in one's soteriological goal, seemed to gravitate to the Pure Land heavens (*jingtu*). These idealized realms had crystalline and jeweled trees, palaces, nets with tinkling bells, and a restful, embracing abiding in

perpetual chant, glorifying the Amitābha Buddha. They nourished the yearnings of the heart and the mind for happiness and rest. The recollection of Amitābha, whose realm was accessible to anyone who was mindful of it, opened up a hidden presence, an internal geography of the mind, as an auspicious space where problems could be resolved. A background of the murmuring birds, always chanting the Dharma and singing the praises of the Buddha, softened this realm of the mind too. Repetition and enunciation, so key to many meditation practices, meant that this simple formula could be a constant, for this mindfulness works at the back of the attention during a busy daily life. It is an internal mantra, remembered to oneself again and again as one goes about one's business. Such a heavenly realm, populated by ones' ancestors and by those nearest and dearest whom one had lost, brought together aspiration and mindfulness: one could remember the Buddha while working in the fields, or at any time, so that the repeated mindfulness became a mindfulness in daily life too, giving meaning to every action of one's day. While the immediate appeal of an Amitābha heaven was for its promise at death, it also became to the practitioner a background presence to sense, advert to, and feel behind the difficulties of conventional daily life—a space in which difficulties can be resolved. Recollection of the *niàn-fó*, the remembering of this Buddha, appears to have answered very specific needs in a practical and expressive way. Physical engagement, with a rosary or even with beans passed in a bowl, meant the practice also suited moments of quiet, when there might not be time for a full, secluded meditative practice. Early on in the movement's history, with Shandao (613–681), the association between this recitation and the inner state was made explicit: “The Pure Land is the mind itself.”

Although often faced with persecution, Pure Land continued to be a much-loved form of Buddhist practice, and when Buddhism went to Japan and Korea, it found

exponents there too. In Japan, Honen (1133–1212) taught the Pure Land as a refuge for those needing faith and trust at a time of *mappō*, the decline of the Buddha's teaching. And later, his disciple Shinran (1173–1263), further adapted the practice, saying that it was the faith, rather than even the chant, that effected change in one's life.

## HUAYAN

Another school of Buddhism that emerged through the influence of Mahāyāna texts in China is the Huayan (Hwaeom in Korea, Kegon in Japan), or Flower Garland, school that first flourished during the Tang dynasty, the period from around the sixth to the ninth centuries. The school takes its name from its primary text, the *The Flower Ornament Scripture (Avatamsaka-sūtra)*, which is apparently based on some other works that arrived in China from India in the third century ce. Taking emptiness teachings and Yogācāra views on the *dharmadhātu*, the sphere or dimension of the dharma reality, the *Avatamsaka-sūtra* purports to demonstrate the unity of emptiness (*li*) and conditioned phenomena (*shih*) and the interpenetration of the realm of all with buddhahood and the awakened mind. The primary image of this sūtra is Indra's net, an infinitely vast network of jewels, in which in each jewel the light of all the other jewels is reflected. The text consists of sumptuous, highly ornate descriptions of buddha fields filling multiple universes, yet it has a sense of the scale of the tiny too: the whole is contained within the minute, the minute in the whole. It is said that Empress Wu, in 699 ce, unable to understand this doctrine, was given an analogy by Fazang (643–712), one of the school's principal teachers, who composed the *Treatise of the Golden Lion*. Apparently, Fazang made a hall in which all surfaces were covered with mirrors. He then placed a lamp and a Buddha image at the center. Immediately, the hall was filled with infinite lights, buddhas, and

inter-reflections. Basing his theory on the emptiness doctrine, he said that when one dharma arises, all others do too; each reflects and interpenetrates the others: “Right here we see an example of one in all and all in one—the mystery of realms embracing realms ad infinitum is revealed.” He then placed a tiny crystal ball in the center, to show the vast in the tiny and the tiny in the vast. The same principle, he said, operated through all times, so the past, present, and future are all reflected in one another. Thus, any action with mindfulness, and without discursive overlays, affects the whole universe. As the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* says, in the small may be found the vast:

As in one atom,  
So in all atoms;  
All worlds enter therein—  
So inconceivable is it.  
In every single atom  
Are all things of all places and times;  
The states and lands, innumerable,  
The enlightening discern and know. (Cleary 1993, 959)

## TIANTAI

China was in a curious situation with regard to the ever-changing nature of Buddhism in India and Southern Asia. Receiving trade, monastic visitors, pilgrims, texts, artifacts, and manuscripts from India via the Silk Road and via regions such as Gandhara and Parthia, it felt each wave of new developments in different ways. A particularly Confucian predilection for arranging a large body of information within a comprehensible whole required that these changes should be organized within a hierarchical system, capable of being assimilated as stages on a graduated path. So, an underlying organizing

principle was needed. The notion of the four turnings of the “wheel” of the teaching, originally developed by the Yogācāra school, gradually developed into an organized, tiered range of textual revelation, with successive waves of teaching integrated into an overarching classificatory system related to stages in the Buddha’s life. Instrumental in this process was Zhiyi (538–597), who developed the system of *panjiao*, five levels of teaching:

1. The teaching of the Huayan (in reality composed long after the third century ce), which the Buddha worked on after his awakening but found no one understood
2. The first discourse, discussed in chapter 1
3. A sermon delivered at Vulture’s Peak, where a new emphasis on emptiness was “revealed” and the notion of the awakening mind imparted
4. The teaching of the embryo of the buddha nature in all beings
5. The *Lotus Sūtra* and the *Nirvana Sūtra*, the summit of the Buddha’s work for all beings

The first and the fifth of these were considered paramount. It is the *Lotus Sūtra*, however, that becomes the core text of Tiantai (Tendai in Japanese), whereby a system of skillful means leads the practitioner to ever greater understandings of reality. In the *Lotus Sūtra*, the bodhisattva is compared to someone trying to get children out of a burning house by leaving a trail of toys for them to pick up and follow. This is the skill-in-means of the bodhisattva’s teachings, gradually guiding us out of samsara. Tiantai saw mindfulness teachings as part of the skill-in-means of the Buddha, who still existed, as did oceans of other buddhas in all directions. Through their power, the unconditioned and emptiness, the noumenon perhaps, could interpenetrate with the practical and the world around. Accompanied by a complex range of visualization practices and devotional activities, the school brought a sense of how each action could become

an expression of awakening. Mindfulness within these actions meant mindfulness in life too and an awareness of the seed of buddhahood in all beings.

## CHAN

Chan Buddhism, known as Seon in Korea and Zen in Japan, arose partly in response to the wave of textual input from India. Humorous, spontaneous, often iconoclastic, “meeting situations without obstructions,” transformed Buddhist practice and theory. Chan stressed the surprise element in what was known as a sudden awakening, which often happened at unexpected times on the basis of practice and constant awareness. Excessive textual study was rejected in favor of practice. The school is famously summarized in words dating from 1108 ce:

A special transmission outside the scriptures

Without depending on words or letters

Directly pointing to the human mind;

Seeing the innate nature, one becomes a Buddha.

(Harvey 2013, 218)

With Chan, words associated with mindfulness are used less; techniques to arouse awareness of the present and a wakefulness to events in the mind and body flourish.

### *The Gōng'àn*

Over the centuries that Buddhism evolved in East Asia, meditations and distinctive styles of teaching emerged throughout China, Japan, and Korea that worked on the arousing of mindfulness in the present moment. One such method was the *gōng'àn* (Japanese: *kōan*; Korean: *kongan*)—that is, the use of disturbing, challenging, and apparently nonrational questions or utterances. When given a *gōng'àn*, the meditator keeps it in mind during the day and in meditation as a means of dislodging the



usual discursive thoughts, mental habits, and logical constructions that obstruct the path to awareness and liberation. These meditations developed in the middle of the Song dynasty (1089–1163) and came to be known in Chinese as *kàn huà*, “observing the key word” (Japanese: *kannazen*; Korean: *kanhwa*). Throughout Chan history, the baffling and the apparently illogical were deliberately employed to effect change: the teacher posed what seemed like a ludicrous statement or question that eventually suspended the usual discursive mind from operating at all, thus allowing the awakened mind to become free. A key figure in establishing this form and associated meditation practices was Dahui Zonggao (638–713). In *gōng’àn* practice, Dahui employed the “key word” (*huàtóu*), “the point beyond which speech exhausts itself,” as a way of ensuring the meditator never lapsed into uninvestigative peacefulness, thus preventing his own path to awakening. The *gōng’àn* is held in the mind at all times—while walking, sitting or lying down, in deep meditation, and in nonmeditative states. It is a way of arousing a kind of prod to mindfulness at all times, ensuring that stale habits, old responses, and logical trains of thought find no ground and cannot operate in the same way.

Here, the factors that might seem to militate against the practice of mindfulness and meditation are mobilized to create urgency and, in particular, doubt, which can, in time, become the “great doubt,” the profound shaking of one’s core that will lead to awakening. *Gōng’àn* methods are even applied to the *niàn-fó* practice, that of reciting the Buddha’s name continuously. Doubt is deliberately encouraged, presumably to question the very basis of the self that is engaging in the activity of worshipping the Amitābha Buddha. Yúnqī Zhūhóng (1535–1615) says:

When you recite the Buddha’s name out loud, whether it is three, five, or seven times, silently ask yourself “Where does this one sound of the Buddha[’s name]

come from?” Also ask “Who is the one reciting the name of the Buddha?” When there is doubt, just go take charge of that doubt. If you cannot get close to the place from where the question comes, don’t cut off the feeling of doubt. Once again raise [the question] “Ultimately, who is the one reciting the name of the Buddha?” (Schlütter 2016, 177)

China, like India, developed particular kinds of Buddhism, but there seems also to have been a pool of practices that in many ways operated outside of the context of different schools and that were subjected to endless scrutiny as well as being widely undertaken. The simple chanting of the name of the Amitābha Buddha, Niàn-fó (Japanese Nembutsu), a constant in many schools, for instance, threads through many practitioners’ daily lives. It appears to be practiced in many traditions. Word play enriches the understanding of what mindfulness can be: the word *niàn* may mean “thought” (and “to think”), “mindfulness” (and “to be mindful of”), and “to recite.” In the seventeenth century Guāngguì has fun with all these meanings in his preface to Pure Land poetry:

So the Tathāgata Buddha taught people to recite [*niàn*] the phrase “Amitābha Buddha,” in order to assimilate all their hundreds or thousands or 850 million random thoughts [*zá-niàn*] into single-pointed mindful awareness [*yí-niàn*], and recite [*niàn*] until not a single thought [*yí-niàn*] arises and they spontaneously get a fully realized view of Amitābha Buddha, then knowing that all their hundreds or thousands or 850 million random thoughts [*zá-niàn*] are in fact the mindful awareness [*niàn*] of Amitābha Buddha. (Eifring 2016, 33)

The mantra is intended to purify the mind; all kinds of thoughts arise as the wandering mind goes over the mantra again and again. As the text above shows, it is felt possible, in the midst of the multiplicity of thoughts, to

find mindfulness and unification too. This is a skill-in-means to ensure that meditative focus does not become closed and that mindfulness is sustained: random thoughts should not be suppressed but simply allowed to become associated with the mantra. The sparkle of Guǎngguì's wordplay shows that in China, Japan, and Korea, mindfulness is seen and taught in new ways that cannot be explored here; but rigid definitions somehow just do not work!

### THE BODY, THE *QI*, AND ACTION

So far, we have looked at different doctrinal emphases and devotional undertakings that have influenced the way mindfulness is viewed and practiced. Mindfulness teachings and doctrines are, in different locations, often informed by local medical understandings of the body, which would be a subject for extensive study in themselves. Breathing mindfulness in Southeast Asia, for instance, is closely related to traditional medicine and technologies, as are many healing practices in Tibetan Buddhism and its associated tantric visualizations. The channels of the breath, and ways of arousing mindfulness with regard to them, are varied and complex throughout other Indian meditative systems as well. So, in East Asia, we can look at one part of the body: the area below the navel, and the *qi*, associated with the breath itself. In the West, we have a somewhat rigid view of what is “mind” and what is “matter.” In China, well before the arrival of Buddhism, the distinction between the two was far more fluid and less clearly defined. *Qi* is seen as the universal fluid/energy from which all phenomena in the universe are constructed. Human beings are made up of varying densities of *qi*; psychological tendencies have physical substrates. All areas are, of course, important: the heart (*hsin*) is the seat of consciousness, and the unlocated *shen*, the spiritual. In Eastern Buddhism, however—particularly in systems connected to Chan—the seat of the *qi* is

considered of crucial importance, affecting posture, exercise, mindfulness, and meditation. For many forms of practice in Eastern Buddhism, the qi offers a physical base for mindful attention, keeping the lower part of the body steady, unshakeable, and grounded. The practitioner is mindful of this area at all times. Most notably in Korean Buddhism, this area is the key to the vital energies in the body and to a sense of flow in physical movements and health; it plays a crucial role in martial arts systems, tai chi, and other bodily disciplines. Action is taken from this area while other areas of mindfulness are aroused. The breath continues to be an object of engagement and practice in Chan and its related schools, as it is in several East Asian traditions; the alignment of the body in appreciating it is just slightly different.

China, Korea, and Japan extended the understanding of the application of mindfulness in extraordinary ways. The martial arts are one area, but there are others that are equally distinctive and inspiring. In Japan, for instance, in the cultivation of the *dō*, a word that is related to Dao in China, a simple activity is transformed by mindful intent, awareness of the whole, and the flowing harmony of the participant with the action that is being undertaken. The tea ceremony (*chadō*), flower arranging (*ikebana*), and calligraphy, as well other arts, are *dō*s, ways of allowing mindfulness to come into being in a graceful and dignified harmony with the teaching. Beautiful and enlivening in themselves, they are often characterized by an emotional and physical expressiveness that allows the present moment to be a noble enactment of the overcoming of the hindrances and the manifestation of the awake mind in the world. For Japan in particular, the present moment is crucial: in the centuries after the arrival of Buddhism, the notion emerged that all beings are awakened already and just need to discover it for themselves. It is a very different understanding of mindfulness: by acting and behaving as

a buddha or a bodhisattva, one becomes one, and the teaching is enacted at that very time.

## SWEEPING THE FLOOR

On a very down-to-earth note, it is worthwhile returning, as so many of the theories of East Asian Buddhism do, to the very simple. For it is here, so many of these traditions stress, that we can find the interpenetration of the li and the shih—that is, the unconditioned and phenomena, the usual world around us. A particular contribution of Chan, its related schools, and indeed of East Asian Buddhism in general to the understanding of mindfulness is in the transformative beauty of the everyday moment. Housework, digging the garden, and sweeping the floor can all be enactments of the buddha nature. In South Asia, the monks worked in a long tradition of the holy man; their basic needs were happily met by the community to whom they gave teachings, support in the Dharma, and good luck.

This never quite caught on in East Asia, and so the principle of working for one's food was established in Chan and its associated schools. As one Zen saying goes: "a day without work is a day without food." Chan, Seon, and Zen monasteries are highly organized, deeply devotional, and disciplined. A period of time is put aside for performing vigorous housework, cleaning steps, clearing gardens of leaves, and ensuring the monastery is very clean indeed. The value of such activities becomes part of the monastic life, and attention to mindfulness in the cleaning of the home, in a beautiful and graceful way, is also emphasized for the laity too. Each activity of the day can be an expression of this mindfulness, investing each moment of any routine with great significance and meaning. As we have seen in the theory, the tiny can be a reflection of the vast. Many stories tell of great teachers, who, fully awakened, nonetheless always sweep their monastery with care and diligence. Thus, the saying

developed: “The most spiritually advanced person is the one who sweeps the floor.”

One day Zhaozhou [778–897] was sweeping. A monk asked, “The master is a great worthy. Why are you sweeping?”

Zhaozhou said, “Dust comes in from outside.”

The monk replied, “It is a pure temple. Why, then, is there dust?”

Zhaozhou said, “There’s some more.” (Ferguson 2011, 156)

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## TIBET

Precisely because of its vast and exhilarating mountainous landscape, Tibet became acquainted with Buddhism somewhat late: it has never been easy to reach. Although some Buddhist scriptures and figures were recorded as having arrived there in the fifth century, it was not until the seventh and eighth centuries that the process of transmitting Buddhist texts from India to Tibet began what has come to be one of the greatly distinctive Buddhist traditions. Spreading eventually to regions of India, Nepal, Bhutan, Mongolia, Russia, and northeastern China, the Buddhism associated with this region has now become one of the predominant Buddhist traditions in the world. While this is, in part, the product of the tragic circumstances of the invasion of Tibet by the Chinese in the 1950s and the subsequent need for so many Tibetans to find homes elsewhere, the highly colored visual images, myths, legends, rituals, and practices, and the sense of the magnificently spacious view of the universe suggested by the texts, chants, practices, and stories of Tibet, have ensured the increasing popularity of Buddhism internationally.

A key event in the establishment of Buddhism in Tibet in the seventh century was the conversion of King Songtsen Gampo (618–650 ce) to Buddhism by his two wives, from Nepal and China respectively. One of Songtsen Gampo's ministers, Thönmi Sambhoṭa, visited India, and, bringing back Sanskrit texts, developed the

Tibetan script, which was designed for transmitting translations. After the death of the king, the tradition lapsed, and the local gods, associated with the shamanic and Bön culture of the time, were felt to be unfavorable. A teacher from Nālandā, Śāntarakṣita (725–788), suggested, however, that tantric Buddhism was particularly suited to the Tibetan people, as the practices of that tradition were beneficial for alleviating such problems. In order to subdue the influence of the local deities, Padmasambhava (eighth century), a great adept (*mahāsiddha*) renowned for his psychic abilities, was invited to Tibet. He is said to have converted many deities, a process that is believed to have been particularly important for the safe welcome of the tradition as well as for the people at large. In 779, Buddhism was recognized as the state religion, and serious translation work began as did what appears to be the gradual integration of rich local customs and deities into the structures and organizing principles. Buddhism itself underwent a metamorphosis.

In order to understand the background to Tibetan Buddhism, we need to remember that it was never the outpost or breakaway tradition that its geography might suggest. Rather, its roots lie in the Indian Buddhism of the period and in the atmosphere of interchange and travel that marked the development of Buddhism in the first millennium. Buddhist universities, such as Nālandā, were the cradle of a great mix of different traditions, philosophies, and practices. Texts were circulated and discussed, practices borrowed and adopted, and instructions and codes regarding personal meditation and practice were subject to constant modification and redistribution. When Buddhism came to Tibet, ingredients that had characterized Indian Buddhism were paramount too: the bodhisattva ideal, the teachings of Śāntideva, a growing pantheon of bodhisattvas, and a sense of the Buddha as a transcendent being. These were accompanied by a wide range of visualization practices



and what are known as tantras, a selection of meditations, rituals, texts, and methods popular in India at this time in all traditions. Typically, tantras involved the visual evocation of a particular deity in meditation, in an attempt to find union or contact with the energies of that being. Initiation and an element of esotericism were usually involved. This became closely associated in medieval times with Vajrayāna, the “thunderbolt” or “diamond” vehicle, and involved the extensive use of mantras and sacred syllable utterances (*dhāraṇīs*). It also often involved the use of hand gestures, or *mudrās*, and maṇḍala representations of deities as a basis for visualization.

Alongside the profuse colors, sounds, and rituals of such practices as the tantras, there was also an increased emphasis on emptiness, and, in some cases, notions that the world was in some sense an illusion, to be penetrated by a purified mind. Sanskrit texts related to the Abhidharma, the philosophical systems based on emptiness, along with the challenging of views about the nature of reality, were used as tools in developing wisdom, and the living traditions of such inquiries, applied to practice, were key in establishing not only the first three foundations of mindfulness but also the fourth, as the world and its dhammas were seen in new perspectives.

Because such systems were so popular in India during in this period, it was inevitable that these waves of Sanskrit texts permeated Tibetan Buddhism, and Tibet has a comprehensive repository of these. Some now only exist in Tibetan, from this period, a cohesive body of highly varied genres on which ongoing work is still possible. To accomplish the task of textual transmission, a highly systematic approach to the translation of technical terms, using a one-to-one, Sanskrit-to-Tibetan formula was adopted. The transmission of practices, monastic codes, and meditation teachings soon followed.

In and around 797 ce, there occurred a debate (or series of debates) at the first monastery that was established in Tibet, known as Samyé. It revolved around a tension within Tibetan Buddhism that can be traced to its ancestry. The Indian “gradualist” approach maintained that it took a number of stages of successive purification of ethics, meditation, and wisdom to reach awakening. Chinese Chan, however, argued that it could be attained suddenly, by piercing through the veil of discursive thinking. It is said that Kamalaśīla (740–795), a disciple of Śāntarakṣita, took the gradualist side, and that Heshang Moheyan (eighth century) argued for the immediate position. The Indian mode won, though traces of this ancient tension can still be perceived in Tibetan Buddhism, in its humor and in an occasional love of unconventionality. Four principal schools emerged from this: the Nyingma, Sakya, Kagyu, and Geluk. While highly differentiated, they share many customs, teachings, and underlying organizational structures, such as the employment of particular kinds of meditation, chanting, and ritual, and even the means of the transmission of lineage. Each maintains particular loyalties to certain scriptures, meditative traditions, customs, and specific lineages of their own.

So how does mindfulness fare in this? In practice, the basic instructions for care and awareness never change, but they are supported and colored by new perspectives on the bodhisattva vow, on lineage, and on the way that the individual practitioner becomes part of a larger vow, including all beings, giving a vast perspective on simple actions that constitute mindfulness in the world. Thus, dhāraṇīs, mantras, prayer wheels, and the use of other ritual practices support this vow and are said to arouse mindfulness in life all the time—of one’s vow and of the basis of interaction between oneself and the world around.

## VISUALIZATION

A key element to the arousing of mindfulness in meditation, with concentration, is the visualization of a deity, a bodhisattva, or the Buddha within seated meditation. In India, such practices had become key to Buddhist traditions, as indeed they had to all the Indic religions, in the centuries when Buddhism moved to Tibet. Indeed, many of the same deities and bodhisattvas are visualized in comparable ways in China, Korea, and Japan. Let us take an example of one, the Bhaiṣajyaguru practice, the devotion to the Buddha of healing.

There is, first of all, an initiation into the practice after one has become experienced in other meditations and practices in daily life. Within the Tibetan tradition, an initiation serves as a kind of rite of passage into a new perception of the world and into a new mindfulness of the possibilities and responsibilities it incurs. It is memorable in itself, with conch shells blown, rituals performed, offerings given representing the whole universe, and devotions made. Then, amid the cheerful liminality conferred by this, one receives, from the lineage holder perhaps, an initiation into a lifetime practice that can inform everything one does, says, and even feels and thinks. Such ceremonies are powerful and effective memory devices. They key practitioners into a world where, through personal transmission, they then find the seed of this within their own meditation practice, enabling the benefits to pervade their daily life and experience.

The practice can be undertaken alone or in a group. It consists of a number of elements, broadly comparable to other visualization practices. First of all, devotional offerings are made as is a commitment to the refuges. This is followed by the invocation and request to the deity involved, with his or her attendants, so that the practitioner can establish a relationship with him or her. The heart and body of the practitioner then comes to reflect the deity. If the ritual and meditation are explored

closely, a number of different ways of arousing and maintaining mindfulness, crucial for such a practice, are brought into play.

At the outset of the practice, offerings are made representing the whole universe, within and without, so that the practitioner—at a physical level—engages and enacts the process, which, it is hoped, is about to take place in the mind too. This requires care and a mindfulness of the body and the external world as the various elements involved in making the offerings (which include flowers, incense, a musical instrument, drinks, and food) are all offered to the deity in various vessels symbolizing the senses, including the mind. The morality (*sīla*) of the practitioner, reaffirmed by the taking of refuges in the deity and in the Triple Gem at the outset, is said to be tested too: the water, for instance, needs to be poured so that it fills the cup exactly to the brim. Too much, and it will be spilled; too little, and the offering is incomplete. Only the most careful attention allows the correct filling of the cup.

Then the invocation of the deity starts. Attributes are listed and features are delineated that comprise a three-dimensional, protected field in which the deity occupies the center. The four great kings, the protectors of the directions in Buddhism, mark the ground while an ocean of highly organized hierarchies surround him. The deity itself, lapis lazuli in color, is visualized according to sacred signs and syllables—which the practitioner finds in himself or herself too—for the duration of this part of the practice. Mindfulness is made ever more subtle and refined as the mind starts to move to the internal world and the various aspects of the microcosm are described and sustained. A sense of the physical grounding of the practitioner is also important. While the invocation and offerings are being enunciated, a number of hand gestures and the uttering of sacred syllables ensure that the body is engaged and wholeheartedly participant in

the ritual. Each one of the senses is represented in the ceremony. The movement between these gestures requires awareness of the whole body, straightness and relaxedness of the spine, and a sense of bodily and emotional flow. When the invocation has finished, the meditator retains the image of the deity in the internal world and in the heart while repeating the mantra. This keeps a base mindfulness of feeling and engages thinking (*vitakka*) and examining (*vicāra*)—associated with the verbalizing part of the mind—at a minimal level. He or she threads through the rosary of 108 beads. This activity engages the body, and also, within the terms of the practice, maintains at the feeling level the steady assurance of the presence of the deity as a devotional and transcendent being, whose healing powers one is trying to integrate into oneself.

After the requisite amount of mantras, the deities are requested to leave, the guru is thanked, and the visualized beings are dissolved into emptiness. An essential part of the process, and a principle found throughout Buddhism and, indeed, magical ritual in other contexts too, is that nonattachment and a willingness to relinquish the content of this world must be undertaken wholeheartedly for this stage of the ceremony to be complete. Then there is a period of deep meditation on emptiness before a formal, clean break with the practice is made. Lastly, the practice is offered, through hand gesture and the mind, for the benefit of all sentient beings. The firm placing of the hand on the ground as the practice is dedicated and the remembering of the physical body brings the practitioner firmly back to a mindfulness of the body and a return to the world.

In this practice, a number of different areas of mindfulness are engaged. At the time, of course, it is not useful to consider at all what they are. The practice itself requires all of one's attention and interest. But the practice is rich with all the associations of mindfulness

we have seen in this book already. There is guardedness and protection of the mind; there is the adverting to a field wherein mindfulness, unified with concentration and keeping it fresh, can operate. There is also the aspect of remembering. These lineages are ancient, and historical figures transformed by their bodhisattva path preside over the visualization.

It could be asked, as is the case for other deep meditations, how there can be an increase in mindfulness when the external world around the practitioner is temporarily outside the objects of attention and interest? How do we square this with other, more mundane understandings of mindfulness of what is going on around us? In this regard, it is important to note that the microcosm created or remembered by the practitioner is its own world. The theory and practice of this is that within that world mindfulness becomes highly refined and sensitive, like a finely tuned scanning instrument, capable of picking up any obstructions or defilements and ensuring that they do not interrupt this transformative, closed universe. It is a world in which fine distinctions and discriminations are possible as the mind is gradually purified from the things that prevent its release of the power of the deity. It is simply not applied outside: those fields and beings within them are, for the moment, simply not remembered except inasmuch as they impinge on this internal world in terms of the demand for compassion or attention. But within that world, defilements and obstructions are temporarily suspended. The mind, the substrate, will remember this, and, if the deities and the visualization are cleanly and effectively allowed to return to their source, and if the practitioner leaves the practice with care and without attachment, this resource will, in a time of need or at other times, be readily available. It is seen as a reservoir of healing power, in a new situation, where there are other manifestations of the need for mindfulness operating.

Such practices have become a distinctive feature of Northern Buddhism. They too need, in the background, careful attention to many aspects of practice (*bhāvanā*), such as morality and carefulness, in the mindfulness of the everyday.

## THE FOUR MINDFULNESSES

One example of the way that mindfulness can be seen within a new perspective and underlying framework is eloquently distilled in sentiments expressed in the Song of the Four Mindfulnesses by Kelsang Gyatso, the Seventh Dalai Lama (1708–1757). Aiming to encapsulate the sūtra and tantra paths in simple verse, he takes four meditations that will encompass them all, offering the meditator a complete path. The first is mindfulness of the teacher. The teacher sits as the immutable union of method, or skill-in-means (*upāya*) and wisdom. The essence of all the refuges of the Triple Gem, it is upon the teacher that one focuses all one's devotion and respect. The second is the mindfulness of the bodhicitta.

On this point, Kelsang Gyatso notes that in the prison of endless wandering are many beings without happiness. They are to be remembered as one's fathers and mothers, who looked on you with so much kindness in your countless past existences. So one should forsake attachment and hatred and think of them all, for all have taken this role in the endless cycle of existence. Without letting the mind become loose, the mind should be placed in boundless compassion, never forgetting the predicament of all living beings.

The third mindfulness is to remember the body as divine, abiding in great happiness and bliss; it is a meditational deity of the three bodies of the Buddha. The mind should be placed in profundity and clarity, without ever allowing it to become loose. The fourth mindfulness describes the whole of the experienced world as a maṇḍala, of the virtual and actual objects of our

knowledge. We are confused in the space of luminosity and so cannot see things as they really are. Therefore, we need to forsake the fabrications of the mind and look at their empty clarity. The mind should, again, not become loose, but rest in its own ultimate nature. Our experience of the six senses is at a “crossroads” for the varieties of appearances, the six sense-consciousnesses, and a chaotic mess of dualistic phenomena, without basis or rootedness. We should look behind these illusions and perceive the true nature of their emptiness, anchored in a state of empty appearance.

In practice, while one is aware of basic mindfulness, there is also an awakensness to a field in which such phenomena are seen as appearances, necessary parts of our daily experience but also themselves lacking abiding form or substantiality. So, when making a drink, for example, one still has to be conscious of the body moving, the touch of the ground, and the careful spooning of coffee in the jug. The four mindfulnesses suggest that it is precisely because of this physical body that one remembers at all moments that it is a friend you are making coffee for, who may have many lifetimes of connections with you but would still like a drink. Therefore, you do it with attentive care. The world in which this occurs, and, indeed, you and your friend, are just seen from an entirely different perspective, without intrusive ego:

When the secret of recollection is revealed,  
every memory is but an illumination  
of self-knowledge in the ever-present state,  
untainted by ego consciousness.

—A SONG ON THE VIEW OF  
VOIDNESS,

*Karma Trinley (1456–1539)*

(Jinpa and Elsner 2000, 147–48)



## MEMORY AND BIOGRAPHY

It is not possible to do justice to the full range of applications and exercises within Tibetan Buddhism that arouse mindfulness in different ways. The debates of monks, where hands are clapped vigorously with each point made, challenge the body and the mind of the opponents, testing awakesness in both. The thousands of full prostrations undertaken by some on pilgrimage require a graceful and very tough grounding in the physical body as well as a wide attention. The telling of rosaries, a quiet discursive way of allowing the ruminating mind to settle, provides an underlying murmur of activity and arouses a peaceful mindfulness that is still awake to the world around.

But one aspect of Tibetan mindfulness training should be mentioned here, as it is key to so many meditative traditions. As in Eastern Buddhism, the Northern traditions developed a culture of the remembrance of great historical figures as a means of keeping the lineages and teachings alive. The centrality of incarnate lamas and teachers and the means by which such figures are chosen—by the practice of showing a small child favorite ritual objects of the now deceased incumbent and seeing if the child recognizes them—rests on a powerful assumption of a group memory or identity. This is retained in each generation by the custom of selecting a new incarnate lama on the death of the old as his new rebirth. Such a person then embodies a living contact with the memory of that deceased person and his tradition. Narrations, poems, songs, and biographies about and by these figures are key in keeping the memory of the line, its customs, and its history alive in the present for each new generation of practitioner. Here are some lines from an early Karmapa lineage holder, which place mindfulness as a crucial but not paramount element in an ascending path:

I prostrate to my gurus.

Oh, you who are immersed in meditative practice  
and have vestiges of virtuous karma,  
this is the essence of spiritual practice:  
the multitude of dualistic efforts  
are but the means to realize  
the nondual inner radiance.  
If the beginner's stage brings  
firmness but not clarity,  
view the perceptions of the five sense doors  
as unobstructed true essence.  
If the beginner's stage brings  
clarity but not great bliss,  
know that perception of mind and object  
is but a creative play of bliss.  
If the beginner's stage brings  
bliss but not the void,  
seal the nature of four joys  
with the unborn, emptiness.  
Even those yogins who possess these three,  
without the reins of mindfulness,  
cannot quell conditioning's force.  
Sustain mindfulness, distraction-free.  
Even those yogins who possess these four,  
without meditation's perfected skill,  
cannot open the clairvoyant and supernatural door.  
Train in the art of deep seeing.

Though clairvoyance and supernatural feats be  
achieved,  
if compassion's perfect skill is not applied,  
true altruistic action cannot be attained.  
Strive in the four precepts benefiting others.  
The result of all this endeavor:  
all apprehensions of being are purged,  
both for samsara and nirvana,  
and all things dependently originated.  
This is what the bodhisattvas perceived.  
Thus realizing the voidness is bearable.  
Affirming all things with the seal of emptiness  
is called mahamudra, the great seal.  
Fully realizing this truth,  
work for others till the end of time.

—LAYING THE GROUND FOR  
FORBEARANCE

*Rangjung Dorje, Third Karmapa*  
(1284–1339)

(Jinpa and Elsner 2000, 125–26)

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## BREATHING MINDFULNESS

We have seen just a few ways mindfulness has flowered, in theory and practice, so that even when it is not explicitly mentioned in a given text or practice it informs and changes actions at every level of the mind and body. Everyday activities and meditation can, through mindfulness, set the ground for new ways of perceiving events. It transforms, and brings openness and lucidity to every element of the path.

So we now look at the most popular practice of mindfulness in Buddhism—the meditation on the breath. Breathing mindfulness was described by the Buddha as “the most sublime” of meditation subjects, and it is regarded as the “root” meditation object. The fifth-century commentator Upatissa compares it to walking by a river or to hearing the sounds of a heavenly minstrel. Many, if not most, schools of Buddhism employ some form of the practice. Buddhaghosa said that it is the only meditation practice developed primarily through touch; we can always be aware of the breath during the day, and it is something that anyone, at any time, can bring to mind. The breath is impermanent, often unsatisfactory, and cannot be owned. Therefore, it is a natural object for insight practice and for the cultivation of an understanding of the three signs of existence: impermanence (*aniccā*), dissatisfaction (*dukkha*), and nonself (*anattā*). But it is also an object that can arouse deep calm. If mindfulness and stillness are brought

together in a trained way, the breath is perhaps the most suitable object to take the mind to jhāna.

The breath trains the five faculties: once a good feeling is established in a sitting for the breath itself, confidence, or the faculty of faith, arises. Over time, the faculty of vigor is aroused as the breath refreshes and brings a sense of vitality. Mindfulness is sustained by awareness of the breath, present at any time in the simple movement in and out of the body. Even if there is a wandering of the mind, the attention can be brought back repeatedly to the breath. Stillness, or the faculty of concentration, is found in the sense of unification and peace that this object brings when trained in the right way. The faculty of wisdom is aroused by the awareness of the three signs found through keeping a background awareness on the rise and fall of the breath. After a while, the balance of mindfulness and stillness becomes stable, the five faculties develop together in unison, and the mind can enter the stages of the practice leading to jhāna. This practice, one that is always taught by a teacher, is, of course, linked to other practices that a teacher may recommend for one's particular temperament and is said to lead to full awakening. It is typically conducted as a sitting practice, in seclusion or in a group, with the eyes shut. However, being aware of the breath periodically during the day is a way this practice can be sustained to arouse a gentle level of mindfulness in daily life.

The Buddha gave a special place to the meditation on the breath, as seen in the *Mindfulness of Breathing Sutta* (*Ānāpānasati-sutta*) where, it is said, he taught it first (M 3.78–88). After a warm address to the assembled company that he describes as the “heartwood” of his disciples, he asks a rhetorical question: What are the benefits of breathing mindfulness? How is it to be cultivated and practiced frequently?

He then goes on to give sixteen stages for the practice, which all lead to the development of the factors contributing to awakening. The instructions are given in four tetrads, each encouraging different ways of experiencing the breath. Each tetrad also corresponds to one of the four foundations of mindfulness, making the process complete. The first, below, establishes mindfulness of body. The second, for feelings, successively trains the breath to be joyful, happy. It extends awareness out to the formations of the mind, and the arising of moods and thoughts, making them tranquil. The third, for the mind itself, experiences, gladdens, concentrates, and releases the mind through the breath. The fourth, for the awareness of law and the fourth foundation of mindfulness, contemplates impermanence, dispassion, cessation, and letting go. All of these apply both to the in-breath and the out-breath. The seven factors of awakening weave through these stages, the Buddha says. Mindfulness is the first of the awakening factors, but there are six others of equal importance: (1) investigation of events, (2) vigor, (3) joy, (4) tranquility, (5) concentration, and (6) equanimity. So the investigative and mindful mind takes strength from the breath, finds joy, and brings it to stillness and then to the equanimity of “letting go.”

The *Ānāpānasati-sutta* describes the first four stages as follows:

1. As he breathes in a long breath, he knows, “I am breathing in a long breath”; or, as he breathes out a long breath, he knows, “I am breathing out a long breath.”
2. As he breathes in a short breath, he knows, “I am breathing in a short breath”; or, as he breathes out a short breath, he knows, “I am breathing out a short breath.”
3. He trains thus: “Experiencing the whole body [of the breath], I shall breathe in”; he trains thus:

“Experiencing the whole body [of the breath] I will breathe out.”

4. He trains thus: “Making tranquil the bodily formation, I shall breathe in”; he trains thus: “Making tranquil the bodily formation I shall breathe out.” (M 3.82)

From early times, the practice is discussed in detail. The Treatise on Breathing Mindfulness in *The Path of Discrimination (Paṭisambhidamagga)*, for instance, explains problems that can arise if one does not pay attention to the beginning, the middle, or end of each breath, long or short. Buddhaghosa, in the *Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, suggests four different approaches to the breath that accompany this practice: counting, following, touching, and settling. Working through these stages, one first counts the breaths, then follows the breath in and out of the body, and then takes a point of contact where the breath “touches” the body, as a sawyer cuts a tree by finding a point of contact with it. In the settling, a mental image may arise, and one’s inward attention rests there, again while being mindful of the breath. This is like a gong, Buddhaghosa says. You hear the gong first as loud, but as time goes on, the sound ebbs away, and you become aware of its subtle after-tones and resonance. This is, he says, like the way mindfulness increases sensitivity to the image and the breath, and with that the mind becomes ever more focused. Because the attention is on the mental image and the breath is retained as a sustaining mindfulness too, preventing sleepiness or the distraction of too many thoughts, concentration, stillness, is developed (Vism 8). These four stages are extensively explained in Sanskrit and Chinese texts too.

Even one form of meditation can have different slants, depending on the instructions followed and on the background and setting to the practice. So let us look at a few here.

## BUDDHADĀSA

Buddhadāsa (1906–1993), fulfilling a wish for rural conditions for the practice of meditation, set up his meditation center at Suan Mokkh (lit. “Garden of Liberation”), where he taught until his death. Controversial on many subjects, his instructions for meditation on the breath follow some classical lines. Differentiating carefully between the long and the short breath, he notes that “the long breath brings a greater sense of peace and well-being” (Buddhadāsa 1988, 27), but he does not suggest changing it through conscious choice while doing the meditation. Rather, he suggests just noticing which one it is when it arises. He advocates arousing investigation (the second of the factors of awakening) to see and notice what mental states make the breath long or short, fine or coarse. When the breaths are short, he suggests making the breath finer, as this will bring calm to our bodies (30). He takes the tetrad as primarily a calm, or samatha, practice, offering great encouragement on arousing joy (the fourth factor of awakening) and happiness as central to these first stages (44–47). He sees these four stages as establishing calm for the fourth tetrad, associated with relinquishment and insight, but underplays this side of the practice. Throughout, his instructions appear to emphasize insight more than they emphasize calm. Like the early commentators, he constantly stresses mindfulness in daily life and the importance of consultation with a teacher when engaging in this practice. So, according to Buddhadāsa, mindfulness of the breath may be carried out in the day too, as a background awareness that helps our usual activities and supports them.

## TRADITIONAL THAI MEDITATION PRACTICE

The teacher Boonman Poonyathiro, who trained as a monk in Thailand in the 1950s and 1960s, teaches a method that is somewhat like Buddhadāsa’s, though he



follows a traditional samatha path. According to this way of practice, it is important to feel on friendly terms with the breath. One arouses tranquility and subsequent stages by establishing the longest breath one can comfortably take. This method differs from some other breathing practice schools in that, in this practice, the length of the breath is more carefully chosen by the practitioner. To maintain the distinction between daily life and sitting practice, the “normal” length of breath is not taken in the meditation itself. In the meditation itself, four distinctive lengths of breath are taken: a very long breath, a moderately long breath, a short breath, and a very short breath. The practitioner learns to feel facility between these lengths of breath and to choose which one to employ in a given practice, though all practices begin with the very long breath as the basis.

There are a number of reasons for this element of choice in setting breath lengths: for a practice that develops jhāna, it is important to be able to return easily and quickly to the “normal” mode and to return to daily life as usual. It means too that when these breaths are undertaken within the sitting practice, there is a greater association of the lengths with the meditation, and the practitioner gradually develops skill in feeling at peace in all of them. The ability to move between breaths develops confidence and a sense of being able to shift between jhānas; mindfulness of these lengths of breath ensures there is flexibility of mind, found through exercising the breath in different ways. For this practice, lightness of touch and a good-humored alertness to the breath are very important, as they encourage the emotional strength and resilience needed to make the mind pliable for the meditation. The meditator then acquires the skills for the development of jhāna through the different lengths of breath and then, if he or she wishes, the formless spheres.

Taking Buddhaghosa's template of four stages of counting, following, touching, and settling, the meditator is mindful of different ways of approaching and appreciating the breath. For the "counting" stage, the object of the mind is the numbers, consciously associated with the breath. Mindfulness is sustained by being aware of the breath itself. For the "following" stage, the breath itself becomes the object of the mind, as the meditator observes it moving in and out of the body, and mindfulness is lighter, being maintained by remembering to keep steady the chosen length of breath.

For the "touching" stage, the meditator lets attention and concentration come to settle on the sensation of the breath as it moves in and out of the body at the tip of the nose or near the lip. Mindfulness now goes to what has been the subject of concentration in the stage before: the breath moving in and out of the body. Buddhaghosa's instructions for each stage are helpful. Here, he says that just as the man sawing is still mindful of the saw as a whole and its movement, so too the practitioner is "not unaware" of the breath as it moves in and out of the body: a low-key way of describing the awareness present then (Vism 8, 202).

For the "settling" stage, special instructions are given by a teacher. The mindfulness is sustained by being aware of whether the breath is an in-breath or an out-breath: the meditator is lightly aware of experiencing the whole breath and the entire body while allowing attention to rest and become tranquil, as the text suggests. As with Buddhādāsa's method, great emphasis is placed on finding good feeling and joy within the breath—this acts as a fuel that gives a steady momentum so that the mind gradually prepares for the deeper meditations. The movement between stages helps flexibility. The method takes a while to learn, and teachers emphasize the importance of allowing time for people to become familiar with the practice so that it can

become a good basis in daily life. Again, a general awareness of the breath is encouraged for daily activities to arouse more mindfulness during the day. Experiencing the whole of the breath and making it tranquil are essential elements in helping the practice to work well.

## NYANAPONIKA THERA

In a very different approach, another twentieth-century teacher gives a contrasting account of the stages of breathing mindfulness. Nyanaponika Thera (1901–1994), a German monk, founded the Buddhist Publication Society in Kandy, Sri Lanka. He ordained in 1936 and lived at the Island Hermitage in Dodanduwa. He decided to do mindfulness training with Mahāsi Sayādaw (1904–1982) and then wrote one of the most famous books on insight meditation, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, now a standard reference work on the subject. He discusses the practice of breathing mindfulness and, in connection with that, the methods he had learned from Mahāsi Sayādaw, which he calls “the Burmese *satipaṭṭhāna* method”—which we will discuss in the next chapter.

For breathing mindfulness, Nyanaponika does not teach the more developed conditions for *jhāna* and *samatha*. Rather, he takes it primarily as a means to develop insight and describes some early stages. He says that breathing mindfulness encourages mental and physical health and that “even such a brief and casual application of the mind to the ‘breath body’ lays the foundation for a very noticeable feeling of well-being, self-sufficient happiness and invulnerable quietude” (1962, 62). The breath “stands on the threshold between the voluntary and involuntary functions, and thus offers a good opening to extend the scope of conscious control over the body” (62–63). In the practice itself, he suggests

not controlling the breath but allowing it to deepen and lengthen of its own accord:

The length or shortness of the breathing is noticed, but not deliberately regulated. By regular practice, however, a calming, equalizing and deepening of the breath will result quite naturally; and the tranquilization and deepening of the breath-rhythm will lead to a tranquilization and deepening of the entire life-rhythm. (Nyanaponika 1962, 61)

Nyanaponika also notes that two factors are aroused by this meditation, mindfulness and concentration, both together, “for ordinary as well as for higher purposes.” Commenting on the beneficial nature of the very long breath, the first stage of the tetrad, he does not, however, suggest consciously altering lengths of breath within the meditation. He advises its occasional use in daily life and advises the application of a “few conscious, deep and calm respirations before starting any continuous work.” The next two stages, of experiencing the whole breath body and of making it tranquil, are not so much explored.

As will have become clear, these methods take a very short piece of text from the *Ānāpānasati-sutta* and explore it in various ways. They are adaptive, use words like “suitable,” and all seem geared to making adjustments according to the teacher’s suggestions for any one individual. Willingness to adapt seems key to the practice of breathing mindfulness. All the schools discussed here include many other activities, such as loving kindness practice, walking practice, and mindfulness in daily life, in an encouragement of variety and the “middle way.” Thus, all follow patterns suggested by the Buddha in early texts: a number of practices, like different complementary medicines, are given to different individuals for their varied needs (Ud 34–37).

All these methods also encourage mindfulness of different ways of perceiving the breath. The texts above

are chosen from the Southern Buddhist tradition, as there is a particular emphasis there on breathing mindfulness as a complete path. But they share features with other schools too. Some Tibetan yoga practices, for instance, also require careful monitoring of the length of the breath so that the meditator can enter and leave deep meditations with mindfulness and without fear. One Chan text (probably from the eighth century), the *Treatise on the Essentials of Cultivating the Mind* (*Xiūxīn yàolùn*), also suggests that one needs to “regulate” the breath, while establishing concentration: the instruction given for one’s attention, though fluid, is clearly intended to arouse a very finely balanced mindfulness and a softness of touch as one attends to this object, thus allowing the tranquility of the first tetrad to arise. One should:

Regulate the breath and concentrate the mind so it is not within you, nor outside of you, and not in any intermediate place. Do this carefully and naturally, observing tranquilly but attentively; see how consciousness is always in motion, like flowing water, a glittering mirage, or [rustling] leaves that never cease. When you come to perceive this consciousness there is no inside or outside, and things are relaxed and natural. (Sharf 2015, 72)

A modern Japanese Zen teacher, Shunryu Suzuki, is blunter. He describes an insight path, finding “letting go” by letting the breath do what it wishes, but observing it, in order to penetrate into the very nature of “I”:

“What we call ‘I’ is just a swinging door which moves when we inhale and when we exhale.”

When we practice zazen, our mind always follows our breathing. When we inhale, the air comes into the inner world. When we exhale, the air goes out to the outer world. The inner world is limitless, and the outer world is also limitless.... actually there is just one whole world.... The air comes in and goes out like

someone passing through a swinging door.... What we call “I” is just a swinging door which moves when we inhale and when we exhale. (Suzuki 1997, 148)

In all these texts, the practice of mindfulness of the breath is carefully described and linked to its place within a larger understanding of the world according to a particular school and according to the specific aims of that school for practitioners. If deep states of meditation are being taught, then the practices are designed to help the meditator feel secure and confident: mindfulness sustains the object of the practice, keeping hindrances at bay and allowing the mind to settle on the breath through wandering around and exploring it, as, in an ancient image, a bee buzzes around a flower. It is a slow and leisurely way of building up mindfulness and strength for the meditation. If the practice is undertaken to develop an insight-based path, or if the encouragement of a more general awareness is being advocated, then mindfulness takes a different role. It keeps overall awareness in the same way but sustains the attention that identifies and labels problems and hindrances so that the meditator can deal with them. Mindfulness helps to penetrate the hindrances and so arouse insight into their nature. It is not developed through the diffuse refining of attention to the breath itself and the softening of the attentiveness in readiness for deeper meditation as it would be for calm practices.

These methods show different approaches to the field of mindfulness: it should now be clear why sticking to one practice is considered so important in all good schools. The kind of development of awareness and attentiveness needed for a samatha practice is different from the kind needed for an insight practice. Traditionally, samatha, or calm meditation, is known as the “wet” way, and the insight way, as the “dry.” If you talk to people who practice in these different traditions, something feels different in their approach: the samatha

meditator might talk about mindfulness refining feeling (*vedanā*); the insight meditator notes how it clarifies identification and cognition (*saññā*). But all teach breathing mindfulness as part of a larger activity of practice (*bhāvanā*)—chanting, moderation in food, and mindfulness in daily life are considered key in allowing the effects of the meditation to have a strong basis and support.

In Buddhist meditation, mindfulness is a matter of a training in the appropriate awareness for one's choice of domain and subject matter: one can choose what to be mindful of and, it is suggested, train mindfulness to be aware of different areas, in varied ways, in order to develop specific skills. In addition, the other awakening factors of investigation, vigor, joy, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity are all enjoined by these different teachings, in different ways and different times.

So mindfulness here is a key, initiatory factor, but it needs the other six awakening factors to be able to mature and develop in the way a particular school of meditation requires for the best and most balanced results. It should be noted too that all the schools above stress the importance of guidance and the need for frequent consultation about one's practice. This is hardly surprising—the breath is so central to our basic functioning that advice is needed if one is going to undertake any systematic meditation practice based on it. Good meditation schools stress the need for a teacher, a “good friend,” or a guru when conducting the adventurous and fulfilling exercise of taking the breath as a meditation object and seeing where it goes. The ancient Greek word for the breath, *psyche*, offers a reminder of the way our minds and our breath are so closely related. And just as our physical health needs experts or those who are trained to help our bodies, so health in breathing mindfulness needs that too.

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## MODERN INTERPRETATIONS

As we saw in the last chapter, mindfulness works differently with different practices. Some practices need wide attention, some need a more discursive attentiveness to the breath to be aware of all of its fine changes and to respond to softening it for the practice of stillness. Others need a more directed attention, sustained by mindfulness and focused on insight; mindfulness ensures the attention remains steady and is not “wobbled” by distraction. While Nyanaponika’s breathing practice, like the others mentioned in the last chapter, still needs appreciation of the whole breath in the whole body, he also describes in his book another practice, which he calls Burmese *satipaṭṭhāna*. This, he says, in some cases and at some stages, needs something different: what he calls “bare attention.”

For this practice, he teaches turning one’s attention to the rise and fall of the abdomen as the breathing is going on, attending to the “slight sensation of pressure” of the breath rather than observing its movement as it passes in and out of the body. The point of contact at the abdomen becomes then the primary object of the meditation, and mindfulness is not extended outward from that until that exercise is well established. Insight, he says, will arise naturally as a result of this attention. He stresses that it is not mindfulness of breathing, and he moves on to discuss the process of labeling needed for this practice. This method, he says, develops mindfulness and concentration but does not lead to jhāna. He says that



many practitioners need the practice of *jhāna* first, but some may not find they can achieve successful results and may find this method more suitable. The notion of paying “bare attention” accompanies Nyanaponika’s alternative method. It is a minimal attention to events that arise in the mind and body, before any kind of response. The original Pāli word that Nyanaponika used for this minimal attention is not clear—it could refer to *āvajjanā*, turning to the object, a very bare form of advertent in some Abhidhamma texts. He himself differentiates this “bare attention” from “right mindfulness.” Bare attention is a good way of describing what one does as a preliminary practice but is not a description of mindfulness itself.

The idea of “bare attention” has spread widely in the West and in Asia. While there is a more extensive range of associated practices than can be discussed here, his teachings are part of a larger movement that has been extremely popular internationally: the *vipassanā*, or insight, tradition of meditation. Largely founded in the nineteenth century and originating in Burma, it was made famous by teachers such as Mahāsi Sayādaw and U Ba Khin (1899–1971). Its appeal was rapid, and it grew in the twentieth century: some associated schools do not encourage the practice of *jhāna*, arguing that all that was needed to attain the path was access concentration, a preparatory state to *jhāna* where the hindrances are suppressed. Some of these, but not all, argue that the Buddha, on the basis of one or two texts in particular, had validated this largely insight-based approach, and that *jhāna* is not only unnecessary but unhelpful (A 2.157). Its particular appeal to the cognitive side of the mind, rather than the emotional or the expressive, earned it the label of being scientific, and it has become popular in Southeast Asia on these grounds. It should be said that in Southeast Asia and elsewhere, such teachings are often accompanied by a strong basis in devotional and calming practices too.

The mode of “dry insight” that characterizes this approach has proved popular in the West, where it has been promoted with striking success by many renowned teachers, such as Jack Kornfield and Joseph Goldstein. While sometimes criticized for being an “invented tradition,” the vipassanā movement has been notably effective, exercising an international appeal and, in part through that, attracting great attention in Southeast and South Asia too.

Another term that arose from this movement is the now popular *nonjudgmental awareness*. The meditation teacher Ajahn Naeb, for instance, taught practicing the observation of the mind through a “nonjudgmental direct observation,” which allows all events “to occur in a natural way” (Kornfield 1977, 13). Again, for anyone who has tried arousing mindfulness, this direction is, like the expression “bare attention,” also clearly helpful advice at many stages of meditation and useful in daily life too.

In the late twentieth century, the modern secular mindfulness movement emerged, describing mindfulness as beneficial for finding mental health and stability. It employs observation exercises, many of which derive from Buddhist practice, that encourage an awareness of one’s own bodily activities as well as an awareness of how emotional, perceptual, and cognitive processes can be seen arising on the basis of new impressions in every moment. Jon Kabat-Zinn pioneered this field, and in the 1980s he developed the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program. This has had numerous offshoots, such as the Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Program.

Kabat-Zinn himself had been deeply influenced by his contact with Burmese vipassanā teachers and both the Advaita Vedanta and Zen traditions. His use of meditation/mindfulness techniques dramatically transformed the way therapy was undertaken in the West. Such exercises, undertaken with the supervision of

experienced trainers, could effectively teach people suffering from mental illness, and indeed many who were not, to find ways to deal with the problems that they encountered. This in itself was a liberating and dramatically effective hypothesis that inspired extraordinary confidence and achieved notably positive results. Kabat-Zinn's formulation, "Paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally," was extended:

Broadly conceptualized, mindfulness has been described as a kind of nonelaborative, non-judgmental, present-centered awareness in which each thought, feeling, or sensation that arises in the attentional field is acknowledged and accepted as it is. (Bishop et al. 2004, 232)

"Bare attention" and "nonjudgmental awareness" are good descriptions of many aspects of mindfulness and have been perhaps unfairly criticized recently. The statement above is a particularly helpful skill-in-means and is actively useful as a practical guideline. Many of us today suffer from guilt, a tendency to self-criticism, and an ingrained worry about the notion of "conscience," a Christian term that, like some others in the twentieth century, became somewhat distorted to become an excessive and very judgmental burden to the mind. So it is clear that amongst methods to return health to the mind, the notion of a "nonjudgmental awareness" is not only helpful but necessary. Such descriptions are also very handy pieces of advice for many stages of meditation. They help those who are trying to arouse mindfulness and have been an effective teaching tool to help the practitioner. Are they full definitions, however? Do they suggest the many and varied domains and powers of mindfulness we have seen described in Buddhism?

Scientific discourse requires the precise delineation of terms on its own ground, but exclusive definitions,

necessary as they sometimes are, are not infallible. Other associations of the cultivation and practice of mindfulness, even among Buddhists, can be forgotten, as can the need for supporting practices. For, as we have seen, these associated qualities do include an intuitive, ethical appreciation, a sense of connectivity with one's larger "place" among others, a sense of one's context, and a sense of actively arousing other qualities seen as healthy and "skillful" in the Abhidhamma sense. Memory, as we have seen, is still involved in rich and unquantifiable ways. The word *nonjudgmental* involves what would be termed in Buddhist understanding as not having an excessive or inappropriate exercise of judgment within the moment. In Abhidhamma terms, that would be the unskillful mental state of worry (*kukkucca*). But mindfulness, in most Buddhist contexts, both theoretical and practice-based, is regarded as intuitively ethical. The *Questions of King Milinda*, for instance, stresses its role as a means of guiding the mind to what is helpful to it (chapter 5).

Mindfulness may not be judgmental, but it does exercise discrimination, and in ways that apply to the ethical sphere too. Other Buddhisms, as we have seen, indicate this clearly too, either because of the factors said to arise alongside mindfulness in suttas; or that always arise with it, in Abhidhamma formulations; or because of its capacity, when directed to particular kinds of objects, as in the repeated mindfulnesses, to direct one's own mind to health. It is certainly associated with skillfulness and vitality in the mind.

Its historical usage varies sometimes. As we saw in chapter 10, some Buddhist theory systems, such as the *Abhidharmakośa*, assign a noting aspect to mindfulness too, associated with retention and memory. In Southern Buddhist Abhidhamma, many associated factors, such as the divine abidings of loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity, only arise when

mindfulness is present, and vice versa. The beautiful factors always accompany mindfulness; they cannot arise without it either. This interdependence is suggested by usages in other Buddhisms too. In practice, ethical considerations, memory, and awareness of the needs of others are considered central elements in the arising of mindfulness in all Buddhist traditions. To use the analogy of the musical instruments we used in chapter 1, when the balanced, evenly tuned “note” is found, in awareness, it seems to resonate with other notes too that always then come into play.

While the insight traditions and the samatha traditions have radically different approaches, they see mindfulness as part of a process of ongoing development, needing important adjustments and supporting qualities at various stages. Good traditions will help the practitioner over many years so that their development and training in mindfulness is rich and varied. This can take a very long time indeed. Advice and help is also a part of this process and, again, often takes place over a long period of time. The secular demands of the therapeutic professions have different parameters and constraints. So how the modern mindfulness movements make any necessary adjustments to their definitions—and evidence suggests many are doing this—is up to them. But as both scientists and therapists are usually the first to acknowledge, definitions are not cast in stone. So it is worth stating that ethical behavior, within a Buddhist understanding, is itself “happy,” productive of good result, and a necessary accompaniment to cultivating the mind and mindfulness (M 1.76, 483).

The mindful mind, according to most Buddhisms, is one that is attentive to one’s own well-being, and that of others. So, mindfulness at an experiential level, operating well, encourages people to smile at their problems and to look sideways at mental patterns as part of being aware of them. It just puts things in perspective.

While the insight traditions and the samatha traditions have radically different approaches, this underlying sense of mindfulness as the capacity to experience each object of the mind with friendliness or neutrality remains. Good humor seems essential if we do not act with heavy-handedness with our own mind! In Buddhist theory and praxis, mindfulness is accompanied by ethical considerations, attentiveness to others, and a light and flexible mind. It is because of this that it has a role in sustaining psychological health and balance, whatever the meditative path.

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## CONCLUSION

The Buddha liked playing with Brahminic terminology, giving old terms a spring-clean, turning them upside down, and adapting them for Buddhist practice. He did so with the term *smṛti/sati* too. The word had been steeped in associations of Brahminic memory, associated often with sacred texts only priestly males could learn and recite. In Buddhism, from the outset, *sati* becomes something else: a way of remembering—and being aware of—the moment at hand. Anyone, not just a priest or a monk, can go for a walk and send their attention wide, becoming gently aware of events going on around, and in the body, and then extend it out again. He or she can enjoy the sunshine or light rain, feel the crunch of stones underfoot or the breeze on the face, hear distant traffic and birds, and just be mindful, remembering the breath: the Buddha taught us the text of the present moment, there for us all, and always new.

As I hope has become clear, the term *mindfulness* does have a history and has shown itself, like Buddhism, capable of being perceived and applied in some quite different ways. But throughout its interesting evolution as a term, some features remain constant: the aspect of being attentive to events going on, the notion of guarding the mind, and the understanding that mindfulness, rightly applied, entails a discriminating as to what is helpful. It also has an active role, either in adverting to certain subjects likely to cheer up the mind and enliven it, in the repeated mindfulnesses, or in its association

with bodhisattva practices, extending mindfulness in a directed way. Within these parameters, its function varies. For instance, as a factor of awakening, it leads directly to investigation and curiosity. Its role in the five faculties is as a balancer. When arising with clear comprehension, it just appreciates the flavor of everyday events: it is like the salt that gives experiences their taste.

Associations with memory still remain. In practical terms, if one is mindful, with clear comprehension, one remembers what is going on now; one needs also to remember where one is, what one is doing now, and what one should be doing soon. Mindfulness helps keep the measure of all these things throughout all Buddhisms. In Buddhism, mindfulness and memory have other dimensions too. In most Buddhist traditions, the chanting and recitation of remembered texts and a sense of the presence of a community in which these practices occur produce an alertness among those participating that is mindful of the tradition they sustain. Indeed, as we have seen, in Sanskrit the word *smṛti* has associations with remembered texts; in China the word for mindfulness, *niàn*, means recitation too. These are all methods of bringing the mind and the body to full engagement with the present moment, either with others or on one's own, as well as one's history.

In Northern Buddhism, ritual and initiations instill a deep mindfulness of the tradition, the teacher, and the history of a particular meditation and lineage, reawakening it in the present. This aspect, in various ways, is seen throughout Buddhist countries. A sense of spaciousness, extending outward, is also often elicited in Buddhist ritual, as well as one's groundedness in a particular spot. Chants and ceremonies at important events acknowledge, remember, and extend awareness out to all beings in the locality and farther out. If one wishes all local deities, beings, and animals in the area well, the natural environment, of trees, animals,



mountains, and rivers, where such beings are, is included in one's overall awareness of the outside world. One becomes sensitive to the presence of a field of being, all around. So the rituals, properly conducted, also help awaken mindfulness, of where one is located, one's place in the larger area about oneself, and the universe beyond.

*How* one is mindful, as the *Mettā-sutta* suggests, is also important, as loving kindness may influence our perceptions of everything in the world around and what we do. In the *Abhidhamma*, mindfulness arises with other factors that ensure that the object, whether other beings or what one is doing in the day, is accompanied by one of the divine abidings: loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, or equanimity. The *Abhidharmakośa* gives a slightly different perspective, associating a base level of mindfulness and wisdom with the consciousness of all beings. Here, and as a way to follow the path, it too needs other factors. Thus, both systems say this mindfulness arises with self-respect and care for consequences that ensure that the mind does not go on routes that will bring harm to oneself or others. Such an awareness is active in its concerns (articulated in the "four mindfulnesses" of Tibetan Buddhism and in the training recommendations of Śāntideva). The remembrance of other living beings as having their own path and being connected in that to oneself becomes crucial. Mindfulnesses associated with the bodhisattva vow suggest we see all those around as being profoundly connected to us: this too is a mindfulness.

Some traditions enact, rather than discuss, mindfulness: the Chan schools, known as Seon in Korea and Zen in Japan, use various techniques such as the *kōan* to break through mental habits and render dull and stale thinking impossible. They challenge the context in which we form the views that we overlay over what we see and experience, so our habits do not work anymore.

A new and fresh way of being and understanding can then arise. The *dōs* of Japan and other such arts throughout East Asia create ways of allowing the present moment to be an eloquent expression of meaning and the awakened mind.

Throughout Buddhist history, theory systems such as Abhidhamma/Abhidharma and, for instance, Madhyamaka, challenge how we classify and label our experiences and require us to lose the rigidity of view and fixedness that prevent the world from being seen clearly and with new eyes. They describe and work on mindfulness of the very way we identify and cognize the world so that thought patterns do not become stale and the mind is freed from particular kinds of fabrications. This is important, particularly if “definitions” of mindfulness are attempted: it might be necessary to try to define it, but, from a Buddhist point of view, *how* we try is important too.

Meditation needs and encourages a very subtle kind of mindfulness, to the breath. The slightest disturbance might shake the peacefulness of the *jhānas*. So mindfulness ensures that even the slightest wandering of the mind, or the smallest defilement, does not intrude; it holds the mind steady upon the object. Mindfulness is there too, according to Abhidhamma, in the formless meditations, though at that time it does not include the body itself. Visualizations and tantric practices require a high degree of mindfulness, as the practitioner conducts all elements of the preliminary offerings, sustains the visualization, dissolves it, and returns cleanly to the world, mindful of beings around. Again, in all these cases, mindfulness is *always* accompanied by other factors: it can be the initiator, as in the factors of awakening, or it can be a support, as in the faculties. Mindfulness does not come alone but arises with other things too.

Mindfulness has become a kōan for modern times. It has put a wedge into our conventional patterns of regarding the mind, demanding a fresh approach. Can it be defined? Russel Williams (1921–2018), quoted below, once told me that its full development was like the taste of an orange, which cannot be explained until you try it yourself. At any rate, this book has attempted to outline the ways in which mindfulness has been described and encouraged in Buddhism, thus helping so many find health and balance. While there are definitions, there is no need to be rigid about them, a means whereby it is immediately lost. The application of smṛti/sati to present events was a transformatory innovation. The Buddha taught how to find an awareness that could move easily within, without, and both within and without, as a means of freeing the practitioner to find a “foundation” within any given situation. He identified a point of equilibrium in the midst of multiple conditions. From here, events can be experienced without getting lost or caught: the friendly equipoise of the middle way. This can always be found and re-created, even in situations of great complicatedness, by everyone. It is a way of being and seeing that finds in any situation a means of being aware that acknowledges that situation yet senses and feels too a path to freedom. It is creative. Such awakeness, in the presence of contradiction, is the heart of Buddhist teaching. As Russel Williams says:

Real mindfulness is to be aware of a situation both internally and externally, and so to see as a whole. That completeness is metta, loving kindness. Metta is the wholeness of things, without separation. So there has to be the realisation of the wholeness of things, that *this* is not separate from *that*. You find that this wholeness is totally accepting, and in it there is the arising of wisdom. (2015, 150)

Mindfulness, it seems, is flexible, intuitively ethical, and attentive and respectful of all beings, including

oneself. The practice and theory of mindfulness has its own history, and the possibilities it suggests are still there for us now.

# ABBREVIATIONS

A *Aṅguttara-nikāya*

Asl *Atthasālinī*

Dhp *Dhammapada*

Dhs *Dhammasaṅgaṇi*

D *Dīgha-nikāya*

Ja *Jātakakatthāvaṇṇanā*

M *Majjhima-nikāya*

Paṭis *Paṭisambhidāmagga*

S *Samyutta-nikāya*

Sn *Sutta-nipāta*

Ud *Udāna*

Vbh *Vibhaṅga*

Vism *Visuddhimagga* (References are to the Nāṇamoli translation)

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SED Monier-Williams, M. 1851. *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press.

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Seon  
Shandao  
shih (conditioned phenomena)  
Shinran  
Śikṣasamuccaya (*The Training Anthology*)  
sīla (ethical behavior)  
Silk Road  
skill-in-means  
smṛti  
Song dynasty  
*Song of the Four Mindfulnesses* (Kelsang Gyatso)  
Songtsen Gampo, King  
Sri Lanka/Ceylon  
śruti (heard) texts  
stories  
sutta  
sutra  
*Sūtra on the Concentration for Encountering Face-to-Face the Buddhas of  
the Present (Pratyutpanna-Samādhi-sūtra)* (Lokakṣema)

*Sutta on Good Fortune (Maṅgala-sutta)*

*Sutta on Loving Kindness (Mettā-sutta)*

Suzuki, Shunryu

sympathetic joy

*see also* brahmavihāras

tai chi

Tang dynasty

tantra

tathāgatagarbha

tea ceremony

Thailand

therapy

Tibet

four mindfulnesses and

Tiantai (Tendai)

*Treatise of the Golden Lion (Fazang)*

*Treatise on the Essentials of Cultivating the Mind (Xīuxīn yàolùn)*

Triple Gem

U Ba Khin

unconditioned

universal monarch

universals

seven

ten

Upaniṣads

Upatissa

Vajrayāna

Vasubandhu

Vedas

Vietnam

Vinaya

vipāka (result)

skillful and unskillful

vipassanā

visualization

in Tibet

West, the

*Wheel of the Law, The* (Henry Alabaster)

wisdom

and calm

Wu, Empress

Wyclif Bible

Yogācāra

Yúnqī Zhūhóng

Zen

Zhiyi

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DR. SARAH SHAW is a faculty member and lecturer at the University of Oxford and a fellow of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies. She is also a lecturer for the online MA in Buddhist Studies at the University of South Wales and teaches at the Oxford University Department for Continuing Education. Sarah received her doctorate in English Literature at Manchester University. She moved to Oxford twenty-five years ago and commenced her studies in Buddhism, Pāli, and Sanskrit.

Sarah's principal research interests are Southern Buddhist meditation and chant, as well as narrative and visual traditions. She has taught and published numerous works on the history and practices of Buddhism, including *An Introduction to Buddhist Meditation*, *The Jatakas: Birth Stories of the Bodhisatta*, and *The Spirit of Meditation*.

She is a longstanding practitioner and teacher with the Samatha Trust, UK, a charity that supports the practice and teaching of samatha breathing mindfulness. She is also a member of a Buddhist chanting group that frequently visits Southeast Asia. Apart from research, study, and meditation, Sarah enjoys spending time with her friends and three grown children, walking her dog, and visiting Scotland.



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